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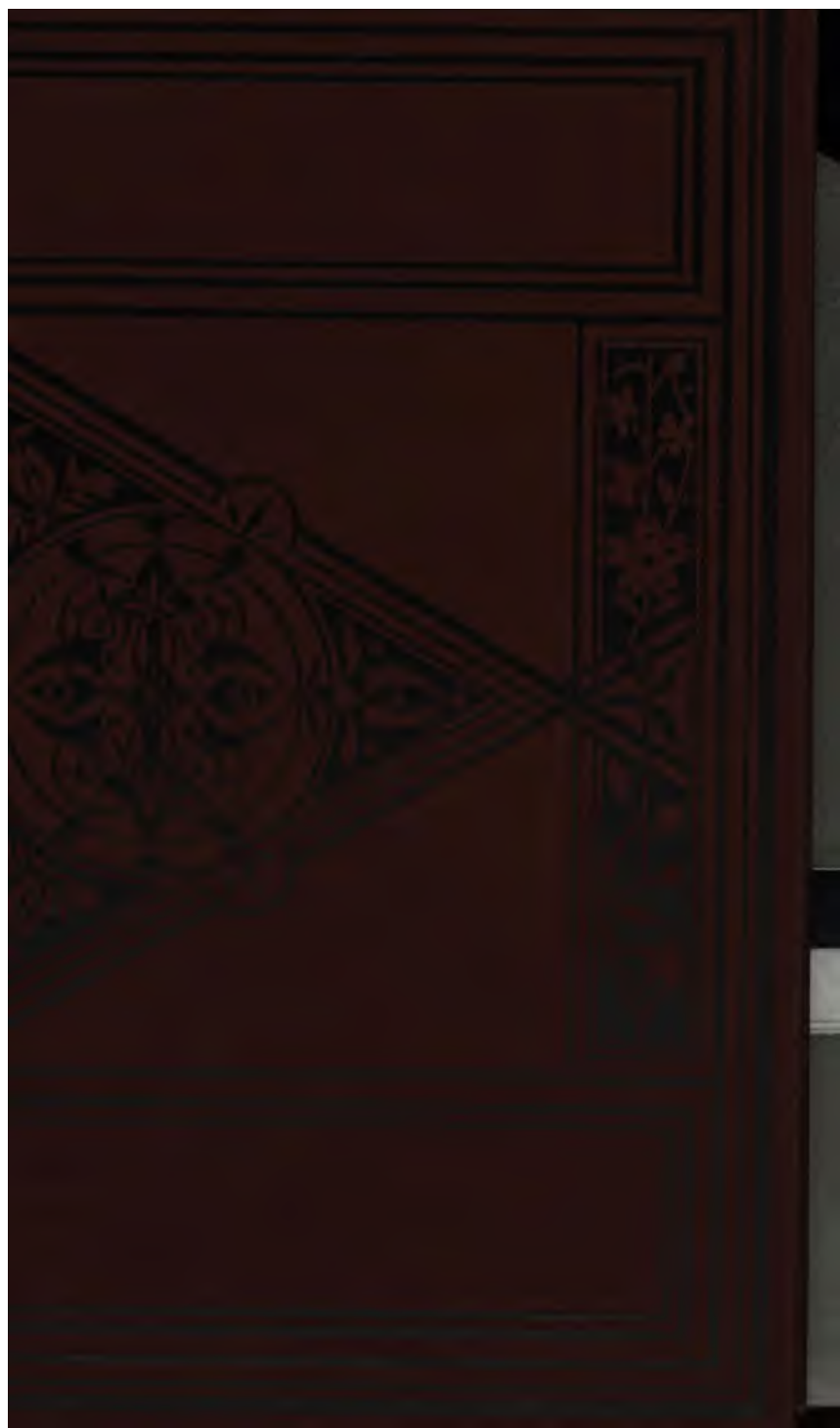
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# ALL ROUND THE WORLD;

OR,

## WHAT'S THE OBJECT?

BY

FRANK FOSTER,

AUTHOR OF "NUMBER ONE, OR THE WAY OF THE WORLD," "A  
JOURNEY OF LIFE," "FIVE DRAMAS," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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# ALL ROUND THE WORLD.



## CHAPTER I.

### *THE MYSTERIOUS PEARL.*



**M**YSTERIES of various kinds abound in the world. Some like inflated dreams or ideal views of glory, become less attractive or exciting as they approach the resistless period of disclosure, or prematurely collapse or explode. Others, again, become more mysterious or interesting on a partial revelation. Faint gleams of light on what was once obscure or dark, may tend to excite the curiosity of those who desire to *know all*.

The mysterious Pearl is still a mystery to all, except a privileged few. This number does not exceed half a dozen persons, including her guardians. Up to the age of fourteen she was a mystery to *herself*. She had hitherto been kept entirely in the dark concerning her own history. She might, for anything she knew to the contrary, have come into the world in the visionary manner described by others. She might have been suddenly "dropped from above in a silvery cloud with a golden border." As a lovely figure in an allegorical picture, she would thus be fairly represented. But *now*, at the discerning age of seventeen, she is aware of having been a *reality* from the beginning. She knows that at one period she had *two* loving parents. She is now fully sensible of having *one*, and a very devoted parent

—one whose entire existence is so completely wound up in the future welfare of his child, that minutes, days, and years seem passed and passing away in one long, continuous, and still unrealised dream.

At a beautiful villa in a romantic part of Derbyshire, Mr. and Mrs. Belman, with their accomplished ward, at this time resided. Pearl had been placed under the charge of her present guardians before she was twelve months old, and her guardians naturally watched her steps and listened to her words and wishes with paternal solicitude and affection. Both her education and health had received the utmost attention and care, while ample means had always been placed at the command of her guardians for these and other purposes. France, Italy, Germany, and Switzerland had each in turn been visited, and had



Pearl been the daughter of some royal prince, she could not possibly have had more attention bestowed either on her training, her health, or her morals. Terribly severe, therefore—both on the side of the faithful guardians and their affectionate ward—was the pang arising from a supposition that the day for a final separation was drawing near.

“I can’t help thinking of papa’s visit here on Monday last,” said Pearl, as she sat with her guardians at tea. “It has made me feel uncomfortable—I might say very unhappy ever since.”

“I can quite understand your being a little disconcerted by his gentle intimation concerning the future,” said Mrs. Belman. “Yet the visit of an indulgent parent should create a pleasurable feeling on the part of a child, should it not, Pearl?”

"Such has been the case with each of papa's former visits; and I don't know why the effect created by the last should be altogether different," rejoined Pearl, thoughtfully.

"May I venture a guess on the subject?" said Mr. Belman, jokingly. "Your papa never before brought a stranger with him, my dear. May this not account for the difference—eh, Pearl?"

"You don't say this to tease me, do you?" inquired the ward, as a smile imparted a pleasing expression to the question. "But who is this Lord Castle, I wonder?"

"He's the son of one of your papa's intimate friends. Did he not tell you so, Pearl?" said Mrs. Belman.

"But as we were entire strangers to each other before Monday last, why should

his lordship be so very attentive to *me*? What's the object?"

"Your papa may have a double, or even a triple object in this introduction," said Mr. Belman. "He has already told you, Pearl, that, on the occurrence of a certain event, which is daily expected, your long term of seclusion will expire. What will be the result, my dear? You will then be withdrawn from your quiet and homely life for one of gaiety and grandeur."

"I have no desire for the exchange; and if you can induce papa to come here and reside with us, I shall be quite content to remain where I am," said Pearl, whose innocent simplicity concerning "*high life*" provoked the laughter of her guardians.

"Your papa come and live here, indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Belman. "When he has taken you to his home, you will

marvel at the idea of such a thing. And I have no doubt, Pearl, that one of the objects for introducing you to Lord Castle was to make you acquainted with the kind of company you will in due time be likely to meet in fashionable society. Did not his lordship say that he had been struck with your *carte-de-visite*, but that the original was in every way superior to the picture?"

"He said a great many silly things that I was surprised to hear from the lips of a lord," replied Pearl, disdainfully.

"But a lord, my dear, is only a human being."

"And a very ordinary one, too, if the *first* that has been introduced to me may be considered a fair specimen of his class," said Pearl.

Mr. Belman observed his ward's reluct-

ance to continue the conversation in his presence, and being anxious to gather, through his wife, the young lady's views relative to an *untitled* gentleman, he left the room for a walk in the garden.

"You don't think papa would wish me to make a personal friend of any one whose attentions might be disagreeable or offensive, do you?" inquired Pearl.

"I should hope not, my dear," replied Mrs. Belman.

"Should he do so," continued the ward, with emphasis, "he will find there is *one* thing concerning myself on which I have a *will of my own*. You may smile, but I've made up my mind that unless my first valentine should become my first husband, I will never marry at all—*never! never!*"

"Pearl, my dear, are you in earnest?"

"I *am*; and your last word, omitting

a vowel, shall be the name of my bridegroom."

"But Ernest Stone has left the country," observed Mrs. Belman.

"He will return again some day, I suppose," said Pearl.

"He is not likely to return for at least eighteen months," replied Mrs. Belman.

"I'll wait for him for *eighteen years*, if he should wish me to do so," said the ward, with increased emphasis.

"My dear Pearl!" exclaimed Mrs. Belman, "you must surely be inspired by a spirit of romance. You have seen very little of Ernest Stone, since, with Maria and Ruby, you were all playmates together. Though you remembered your first valentine, as you call him, you have not been in his company for many years until you accidentally met each other a

few months ago. Between that time and his departure from England, he could not have spent more than three or four evenings with us altogether. Your knowledge of Ernest must have been chiefly obtained in the days of childhood."

"Very true," was the cheerful reply. "But when, on the verge of manhood, the restored hand of early association warmly grasped mine at our unexpected meeting in Netley Abbey, the charm appeared like the realised ideal of a beautiful dream, and the exquisite sensation produced by the reality has left an impression that nothing can ever efface."

"But your 'papa, dear Pearl, has never heard of such a person as Ernest Stone. May he not raise an objection that may prove fatal to him as a suitor for your hand?"

"What objection could he raise?" innocently and anxiously inquired the ward.

"The greatest of all objections on the part of those who rigidly observe their ancestral customs or obligations," replied Mrs. Belman. "Ernest, as you are aware, my dear, has no titular distinction beyond that of the plain name of a respectable but *untitled* family."

"Could he have a better title than a *respectable* one?" said Pearl. "A grand name may be given to any little puppy—in the same way that Miss Elder christened her Italian greyhound the 'Doge of Venice.' Papa says I am to go to Court with him some day. If so, I'll ask the queen to give a title to my first valentine."

"Bless the dear child!" exclaimed Mrs. Belman, with a loud laugh. "Unless the novelty of the request should induce the



queen to grant it, Pearl, I fear, will plead in vain for her first valentine."

"Then her valentine may perhaps be satisfied with his title to Pearl's affections," was the ward's reply.

The conversation on the subject was now brought to a close by the re-appearance of Mr. Belman.

NOTE.—Three months are supposed to elapse between this and the succeeding chapter.



## CHAPTER II.

### *MARRIED LIFE.*



**T**HREE months constitute a very short period in the annals of the world. Such a period cannot be deemed a very long one in the average term of human existence. Yet, during the brief space of three months many important events may take place in the history either of nations or individuals. It has been even so with several characters in the present story.

Colonel Stone, the wealthy widower of three months ago, and Mrs. Bland, the

poor widow of the same period, are no longer in their former distinctive positions of *master and servant*. The relationship is entirely changed. The colonel and his late housekeeper are now *man and wife*. From the social incidents already recorded—incidents that created on the part of the rich widower a sincere attachment for the poor, but estimable widow—it may be fairly assumed that the union is likely to prove in every way felicitous. The disparity in age and the still greater disparity in station between the bridegroom and bride, are not in this case, as they are in many cases, sufficient in themselves for uneasiness concerning the future. On the contrary, there is everything to justify the belief that Mr. and Mrs. Colonel Stone, as man and wife, have no reason to fear that disagreeable change that so often succeeds a matri-

monial alliance between persons of opposite stations in life.

Another marriage must now be recorded. Ruby Stone and Mabel Wood no longer continue in a state of single blessedness. They are now *doubly* blessed—blessed through that holy bond which has at present made them as joyful and happy a pair of united lovers as any to be found in a kingdom which has itself been so long and so beneficially *united*. Ruby is no longer under the guardianship of his uncle, but has the possession and entire control of his large fortune. He has bought an estate in Devonshire, and is at present residing thereon with his beautiful bride. He is just about to erect an observatory for the prosecution of his favourite study, and it may be truly said that his life at this moment is divided between the love of science

and a love still more precious and profound. Mr. and Mrs. Ruby Stone may therefore be left for a while to themselves, in order to record the movements of a senior pair in the hour or zenith of human felicity—the uncle and his domesticated wife.

Colonel Stone, shortly after the marriage with his housekeeper, closed his London establishment, and proceeded with his wife, his step-daughter, and his niece, to Paris. Here he had made arrangements for a sojourn of six months' duration, in order that the two young ladies may make themselves more familiar—as they are anxious to do—with the French language and its multifarious idioms. Such is the chief object of the intended protracted visit.

“Paris is all very well for a month,” said Mrs. Stone after that time had been passed therein.

In that plain, yet significant observation, Mrs. Stone probably gave expression to the opinion of nine-tenths of the English people who visit the great and attractive fair of fashion and frivolity. Paris is all very well for Britannia's sons and daughters to go to now and then, as they would go to the opera, or to an occasional ball or *soirée*. But the great majority of Britannia's sons and daughters would have a great objection to be for ever in the midst of scenes and society in which there is so much that is artificial and so little that is natural. The domestic quiet of an English home is something almost, if not entirely unknown in France. When critically reviewed by a Frenchman as a foreign luxury, "Home, sweet home" is pronounced as distasteful to himself as French olives would be to the unsophisticated palate of English lads and lasses.



The opinions of the young ladies on the subject, after a brief residence in Paris, may be gathered from the following letter of Maria Stone, to one just created a sister, through marriage :—

“ Paris, March 25th,

“ Meurice’s Hôtel, Rue de Rivoli.

“ MY DEAR SISTER,

“ Although you have long been as dear to me as a sister, how shall I convey to you in simple language a faithful reflex of my feelings, on addressing you for the first time as my *own* and *only* sister? Or how shall I describe that family sense of delight produced by your first joyful note with a corresponding salutation? I will not, *my dear* sister, attempt an impossibility, but simply allow a repetition of the newly-created title, to give assurance of a love

which is too deeply felt to be adequately described.

“ I am, as you may suppose, highly delighted to hear that the great social change in your condition (from ‘ Wood to Stone,’ as uncle calls it), has been productive of so much joy, and that your path has been illumined by unbroken sunshine. Your present experience of married life prompts you to express surprise that there should be so many old maids in the world. But that, my dear sister, may not be the *fault* of the old maids. Yet, your glowing account of the sweets of matrimony, together with visible evidence on the subject supplied by Mr. and Mrs. Colonel Stone, may change the resolution of a certain *young* maid. You almost incline me to *re-consider* my former judgment, if not to reverse the decision that I would *never marry* !

“ I will now, agreeably with your request, and as briefly and clearly as my ability will permit, furnish you with a few of the impressions created by our first month’s residence in this wonderful city.

“ Gay and sparkling Paris may produce a dazzling effect at *first sight*. Strangers are for a time fascinated by an aspect the very opposite of that presented by smoky London. Between the general demeanour, the tastes, and the habits, by which the inhabitants of the two cities are distinguished, the contrast is equally striking. In the life of the people *here* there is a sort of vivacity that prevents even solemn things from becoming serious ones, while in the English metropolis, instead of this giddy indifference, a thoughtful expression is visible among all classes. Yet, amid the boundless riches of London there are outward

and painful signs of misery and destitution in certain quarters. In Paris one is only permitted to see the 'gilt on the ginger-bread,' while all beneath is concealed from view. But in the background or behind the scenes of this artificial and glittering city there are, no doubt, all kinds of strange and unsightly people—people with sores, blind or crippled people, and people in rags; yet in London *only* are such persons allowed to exhibit themselves to the public gaze, as objects of charity.

"Turning to *our own* life in the great centre of gaiety and fashion, I may observe that we are very comfortably located at this hotel. We have a private sitting-room, in which there has been placed a good piano for our special use. Rosa and I receive daily instruction in music and French from two competent masters. We are not per-

mitted to address either our teachers or attendants except in their own language; so we must be very dull pupils indeed if, at the expiration of our six months' term, we should not be able to speak French fluently.

"We sometimes dine at the table d'hôte, but more frequently in our own private apartment. The latter is much preferred by Aunt Stone, and uncle always consults the wishes of his wife on such matters.

"You observe, Mabel, I can now boast of an aunt as well as you! Yes; and I should be very sorry to exchange *my* Aunt Catherine for *your* Aunt Mary. But I am truly glad to hear that in your husband you have found a relative in comparison with whom aunts, uncles, cousins, and the like—as if seen through a telescope re-

versed—appear to be very small and very distant objects.

“ I have now a little home news to communicate of a very remarkable character. Yesterday morning uncle received from the person in charge of his London mansion a letter to say that Mr. Belman had called there, and appeared very anxious to see the colonel. This morning a note came from Mr. Belman himself, to say he was coming to Paris for the express purpose of seeing uncle, and that he hoped to have the pleasure of calling on him this (Thursday) afternoon.

“ Please to make Ruby acquainted with this news, as Mr. Belman was an old neighbour, and an intimate friend of the family during the time of our childhood. We are totally at a loss to know, or even to guess, the object of his present urgent

mission. But we are all very anxious on the subject, as the expected visitor—after an absence of many years—recently renewed his acquaintance with Ernest, and we consider it possible that he might either directly or indirectly have heard from our dear brother.

“In conclusion, I may observe that if there be any one thing in particular that would make me look forward with pleasure to the period of our intended departure from Paris, it is the prospect of paying my first visit to Mabel since she became the beloved sister of her affectionate

“MARIA.

“Mrs. Ruby Stone.

“P.S.—On the completion of Ruby’s observatory and the erection of his monster telescope, I suppose we shall hear of

some new discoveries in the *celestial* hemisphere?"

On the supposition that Mr. Belman might possibly arrive during the evening, Colonel Stone ordered dinner to take place an hour later than usual. The family had only just taken their seats at the table when the expected visitor was announced. He had put up at his old hotel, the Bristol, Place Vendôme, and only remained to change his costume before proceeding to call on the colonel.

The visitor was cordially welcomed by the family, and at once invited by the host to take a seat at the dinner-table. During the repast, and in the presence of the waiters, nothing was said relating to the chief object of Mr. Belman's visit, and the conversation was confined to the lead-



ing topics of the day. But the visitor—who had frequently spent a day with the late rich merchant—thought to himself that he beheld in the wife of the host the housekeeper of the colonel's late brother. On that subject, however, prudence counselled *silence*.

Immediately the cloth was removed and the waiters had retired from the room, the visitor proceeded to disclose the object of his mission :

“ I have no doubt, Colonel Stone, you will be surprised to hear that I travelled from Derbyshire to London, and came expressly from London to Paris, for the sole purpose of obtaining a little information concerning your absent nephew, Ernest ?”

“ God bless my soul !” exclaimed the host in surprise, and with evident disappointment—a disappointment shared by

the ladies—"you have *indeed* surprised us, Mr. Belman, as the very intelligence you seek is that we hoped and believed you were about to convey to us."

"Then I sincerely regret my inability to afford you the information I myself desire. But have you not heard from your nephew since he reached his destination?"

"By a letter written on board the *Britannia*, and posted in Melbourne, we have been assured of his safe arrival."

"That's strange, as he promised to write to *me* on his arrival," said Mr. Belman thoughtfully. "Do you not know his present address, Colonel Stone?"

"I do not," was the rather curt reply of the host, who appeared at a loss to comprehend the motive of the inquisitor.

"I wish I knew where a letter would be likely to reach him," said the visitor.

"And I wish I could aid you in your desire, as you appear to be very anxious on the subject. But what's the object, Mr. Belman?" inquired the colonel.

"The truth is," replied the guest, confusedly, "I—that is, Ernest promised to write to me on reaching his destination."

"You said that before, my friend. But you did not expect him to write to you ere he had written to his own friends, I suppose?" At this moment certain ideas flashed across the mind of the speaker. He now remembered that Mr. Belman had failed as a merchant, and he thought the girl through whom Ernest had been exiled might possibly be some poor relative for whom the visitor might be anxious to secure a rich prize. "You have not, I presume, seen my nephew for some time past, have you, Mr. Belman?"

"Yes, uncle," interposed Maria. "Don't you remember my telling you that Ernest met Mr. and Mrs. Belman at Netley Abbey?"

"I saw your brother a few days before he left England," said the visitor.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the host. "And as you appear to take so much interest in the welfare of the absentee, you will, I am sure, pardon me for asking whether you ever heard of his attachment for some poor and uneducated girl?"

An instant blush of crimson on Rosa's features, together with significant glances exchanged by Mrs. Stone and Maria, denoted that the sensation created by the inquiry was not confined to the visitor.

"Without any desire to evade your question, Colonel Stone, I hardly know how to answer it," replied Mr. Belman.

“ I certainly imagined from his conversation that your nephew had formed an attachment for a young lady, but I have now for the first time heard that the object of his affection is a *poor* and *uneducated* girl.”

“ A girl—so I have been informed—that can scarcely read or write her own name,” added the colonel.

“ Is it possible ?” said Mr. Belman, who now began to think that Pearl might not be the *only* sweetheart of the wanderer.

“ Then you have no personal knowledge of a poor girl of this kind, Mr. Belman ?” inquired the host.

“ None whatever,” was the reply.

“ I suppose, Mr. Belman,” said Maria, “ that Pearl, our former playmate, has quite completed her education ? Can she speak French fluently ?”

"Quite as fluently as she can speak English. We were rather more than two years in Paris," replied the visitor. "Many changes have taken place since the death of your papa, and I was surprised to find that Ernest had resolved to leave home for a while. But I suppose your brother Ruby—the scientific bud as we called him—is still in England?"

"Oh, dear, yes," interposed the colonel, with a smile, "and, like a few others in the world, he has recently taken to himself a wife."

"What? Is Ruby married?"

"*That*, I believe, is the usual result of taking to oneself a wife," was the humorous reply of the host, whose inclination for jesting was at once arrested by the seeming discomfiture of Mrs. Stone.

"Possibly your married nephew, Ruby,

may be acquainted with the address of his brother ?" said Mr. Belman.

"Such a thing is not impossible, though highly improbable, as Ernest is, no doubt, continually on the move," said the colonel.

As the host could not supply, nor the guest obtain, the information required, they turned to other and more entertaining subjects.




### CHAPTER III.

*LOVE AND SCIENCE.*





HE reader of the present story may remember that when Ruby Stone, the scientific amateur, in company with a collegiate companion, made his first *tour* through the west of England, he expressed himself highly delighted with the charming county of Devon. The tourist declared Devonshire to be that part of the kingdom, above all others, in which he would like to possess an estate, build an observatory, and make the locality his "head-quarters" for the remainder of his

life. On the following day—after his collegiate companion had left for home—Ruby assisted in taking up from the road, in an insensible state, a young lady, who subsequently became his wife.

Near Chestnut Park, in the north of Devon, Ruby Stone is now erecting on his recently purchased estate the fine observatory he had previously pictured in his imagination. It would thus appear that the mind, in its early desires, may sometimes foreshadow events of the future that will in due time occur in the serial order of their original conception.

But if in this case there be anything that may be regarded as universal in its application to other cases, the purest and most blessed state of existence cannot be entirely free from family alloy. Even at this early stage of married life—almost before the

close of that blissful period termed the "honeymoon"—the happy bridegroom has discovered that it is quite possible for the most lovely objects on earth to be unavoidably associated with persons between whom there is no social affinity whatever, beyond the kindred tie of relationship. In the same way that a beautiful rose will bloom in the midst of thorns, the most charming human flowers in creation may be surrounded by family briars that are endurable *only at a distance*. Such is the discovery made by Ruby Stone, ere six weeks have elapsed from the day of his matrimonial alliance.

A very handsome pre-nuptial settlement had been made on the bride. But by the prudent forethought and advice of Colonel Stone, this settlement was made in a manner that would prevent any designing

spirit from touching the principal, even with the assent of the lady, for whose special benefit thirty thousand pounds had been placed in the hands of trustees.

Ruby's uncle was doubtless aware of the horse-racing and betting propensities of Sir Wily Wood, the bride's father. He knew of the uncertainty relative to money matters among all persons connected with the turf, from the highest to the lowest. He therefore acted the part of a wise counsellor, by inducing the nephew to make his wife's private fortune secure against the encroachment even of a parental gambler. Of the wisdom of this step a proof will now be furnished.

Having received no previous intimation on the subject, Ruby was one day surprised by the arrival from London of a visitor in the person of Mr. Sharp, Sir

Wily Wood's solicitor. As a thorough man of business, Mr. Sharp quickly disclosed the object of his mission. His client, Sir Wily, was in difficulties, or in other words, the sporting baronet was at present in a state of pecuniary embarrassment. The small sum of ten thousand pounds would enable him to tide over his immediate difficulties, and after the great Derby race—for which he had a promising horse entered—Sir Wily intended to sell his racing "stud" and to retire for ever from the turf.

Such was the substance of Mr. Sharp's communication to the recently-created son-in-law of Sir Wily Wood. Ruby's reply was prompt and noble, if not exactly what some persons might deem prudent and wise. On the solicitor's positive assurance that it was the intention of his client to

retire from a position that had proved disastrous to him both in pocket and reputation, Ruby at once consented to advance his father-in-law the sum required, and he promised to write to his broker to sell out Bank Stock to that amount.

This generous act on the part of a devoted husband was considerably hid from a loving wife. The bare knowledge of such a thing at this early and happy period in her married life would have been a severe shock on her sensitive nature. Such a shock at such a time would have sadly clouded her joyful spirit, if it had not entirely destroyed her peace of mind.

Chestnut Hall, in the centre of Chestnut Park, is more remarkable for its elevated and commanding position than for any stately appearance or architectural beauty of the building. It is better known for its

internal conveniences and comfort than for its external grandeur. But the beautiful and expansive views by which the mansion is surrounded, and the finely wooded park in which it stands, are perhaps equal in their pictorial aspect to any in the county of Devon.

Mrs. Fry, the "good old soul," as she is termed, who keeps the lodge at the entrance to Chestnut Park, is a quaint old dame, of the real Devonshire stamp. She lived in Chestnut Lodge as the wife of the late park-keeper; and she has since lived here for twenty years as a widow. Mrs. Fry knows everybody for miles around, and everybody for miles around knows Mrs. Fry. The "good old soul" already begins to appreciate the gentle words and ways of the new and resident proprietors of the Chestnut estate; and Mrs. Ruby



Stone derives a good deal of very useful information, and more than a little amusement, from an occasional chat with Mrs. Fry.

"Did you notice whether my husband passed out of the park just now, Mrs. Fry?" inquired the young mistress as she entered the lodge.

"Iss fay now, I did, ma'am," quickly replied the nimble old dame, on placing a chair for her visitor. "I zeed'n a bit ago ride out 'pon the gray mare, along wi' Fairmer Grange: he towl me to zay he'd be back about *tu*, or zoon arter, as he was marely gwain to zee zumbody at Willow Fairm. I s'pose, ma'am, *you* did'n yer the rayzin for 'em calling that the Willow Fairm, did'e?"

"Was there some special reason for giving it that title?" said Mrs. Stone.

“ Bless the hinnasense o’ my *gude* young misses!” exclaimed the historical recorder. “ If the poor creters as died at Willow Fairm ’bout fifty years ago was allowed to rise a little afore their time, or if the hanimals theirselves that was lost could only bear witness ’ginst that black zarpent as caused sich weeping, *yu’d* zune larn why they’ve zince then called the place Willow Fairm.”

“ Pray tell me, Mrs. Fry,” said the attentive novice, “ what you mean by the black serpent ?”

“ That was Hag Handforth, the witch—her that witched the poor hinnosent hanimals.”

A fit of laughter on the part of the listener induced Mrs. Fry to qualify the serious character of her narrative.

“ I s’pose, ma’am, *yu* baint a belayver

in witchery? but I s'pose yer mother was?"

As these questions provoked renewed laughter on the part of Mrs. Stone, the recorder, after another attempt to make the matter appear less ridiculous in the eyes of a *disbelayer*, said :

"The fairmers down yer about baint all on 'em o' the zame way a' thinkin' *now*, ma'am, I can tell'e: but in course, ma'am, they baint troubled now-a-days wi' that zarpent, Hag Handforth, as was livin' when I was a chield."

"My dear Mrs. Fry," said her young mistress, as she rose to depart, "I am delighted with everything in Devonshire, except that remnant of superstition which is still retained in the memory, and permitted to haunt the mind, of many a '*good old soul*.' "

At this moment a stranger in a hackney carriage—apparently from the railway station about five miles off—was driven up to the lodge gate, and Mrs. Fry hastened out to ascertain the wishes of the gentleman. On being informed that Mr. Stone would not be at home before two o'clock, the stranger, on giving Mrs. Fry his card, said he would have the horse and chaise put up at a roadside inn, and return again at the time named.

“Mr. Belman!” exclaimed Mrs. Stone in amazement, on taking the card from the lodge-keeper. “How very strange, to be sure! It is not more than three or four days ago that I heard of his being expected in Paris. I hope my husband will return in time to receive our unexpected and welcome visitor. Open the

gate, Mrs. Fry, immediately on the stranger's return."

So saying, Mrs. Stone hurried off from the lodge to Chestnut Hall, highly delighted—as her sister-in-law had previously been in Paris—with the prospect of gaining some tidings of her unknown and absent brother, Ernest.

Ruby happened to reach home a little before the arrival of the visitor, and was much pleased to find that his wife had already given orders for a substantial lunch to be ready for entertaining Mr. Belman on his arrival. Ruby was standing in front of the house, when the fly, containing the friend of his late father, was driven up to the principal entrance.

"Welcome to Chestnut Hall!" said the proprietor, on taking the visitor warmly by the hand as he alighted from the carriage.

"I am very pleased to see a gentleman whose features remind me of old times in my young days."

"Ah!" exclaimed the visitor. "In that respect you have the advantage of me : for in the absence of positive knowledge on the subject, I might now say, have I really the pleasure of shaking hands with the brother of my young friend, Ernest Stone ? But let me assure you, Mr.——"

"*Ruby*, as of old, if you please, Mr. Belman," interrupted the young gentleman.

"Well," continued the visitor with a smile, "it is not an easy thing to change a familiar and friendly name for a formal one ; yet, the lapse of years makes it difficult to recognise the little Ruby of the past in the full grown man of the present."

Mr. Belman, being the first unrelated

visitor\* at Chestnut Hall since the marriage of the new proprietor, he was favoured with a reception that must have been highly gratifying to his feelings. He was compelled to discharge the flyman he had engaged to take him back to the railway station, as Ruby insisted on his remaining at Chestnut Hall till the following morning. The advanced student of science was anxious for an old acquaintance of the family to see—among other things—a grand observatory now in a fair way towards completion.

On finding that Mr. Belman had come to *gather* rather than to *furnish* information concerning Ernest, Mrs. Stone's disappointment appeared greater even than that of her husband. When they had partaken of lunch they seated themselves in front of

\* Excepting the money-borrower.

a good fire which proved an agreeable addition to the comfort on a bitterly cold day in an unusually cold March.

"Poor Ernest!" said Mrs. Stone, "I *did* expect, after what Maria said in her letter, that you would have been able to give us some tidings of our absent brother."

"Your sister's disappointment, as you may suppose, Mrs. Stone, was not less than your own, while I can assure you that mine, in not being able to relieve your anxiety, is quite equal to that of either," replied Mr. Belman.

"The colonel, of course, introduced you to his wife?" said Ruby, with a smile. "And, of course, you remembered his wife in another capacity during your visits to her husband's late brother?"

"I thought I *could not* be mistaken, but



the subject was not alluded to," replied the visitor.

"I'm rather surprised at *that*, as uncle feels proud rather than ashamed to let people into the secret."

"He might well feel proud of such a partner, for I always regarded Mrs. Bland as a person qualified for the wife of *any* gentleman. But your uncle and I are comparative strangers, as I only met him at his late brother's on one or two occasions," said Mr. Belman.

"But I presume," said Ruby, with a laugh, "the colonel asked you—as he asks *everybody*—whether you knew anything concerning the whereabouts of some poor girl for whom my brother is supposed to have an attachment?"

"He was very solicitous on *that* point," was the reply.

"I thought so," added Ruby.

"Pray, what is *your* opinion on the subject?" inquired the visitor, who was equally anxious on the same point, although he disguised his anxiety as much as possible.

"I should like to know *your* opinion, Ruby?"

"*My* opinion, Mr. Belman, is simply this—that the whole affair from beginning to end is nothing more nor less than a myth, and that the poor girl to whom Ernest is supposed to be attached exists only in the imagination of the writer of an anonymous letter. The independent spirit of a young fellow of pluck naturally revolted at a cross-examination founded on a nameless epistle. This, in my opinion, is the sole cause of his two years' exile. Had he really bound himself to an unlettered lass, somebody in the family would surely have

got scent of the affair, although it might not have reached the clouds in which I was then so busily engaged."

"I am delighted to hear a sensible opinion so clearly expressed," said the visitor. "I thought your brother, Ernest, would not be likely to throw himself and his prospects away on a girl that can neither read nor write ; but if he has really entered into a private and imprudent engagement, he has, at least, proved his ability to keep a secret from the knowledge of his friends."

"Very true, my friend," said Ruby, with a smile. "But this power of silent reservation has appeared in bygone days with other friends. It reminds me of a little incident at the time you and Mrs. Belman adopted—if it was an adoption—that

beautiful and engaging young prattler, the mysterious Pearl, as we called her. The affair was, of course, a matter that exclusively concerned yourself, yet you may remember the critical curiosity created by your reserve on the subject, when the neighbours, right and left, were heard to say—*what's the object ?*"

Perceiving an inclination on the part of the visitor to evade that delicate question, Ruby at once changed the subject of conversation.

A few days after Mr. Belman's departure from Chestnut Hall, intelligence was received of the death of one who had been the cause of Mabel's past troubles, and to whose sinister designs all the newly-married lady's future trials may be traced.

On her way to pay her first visit to her

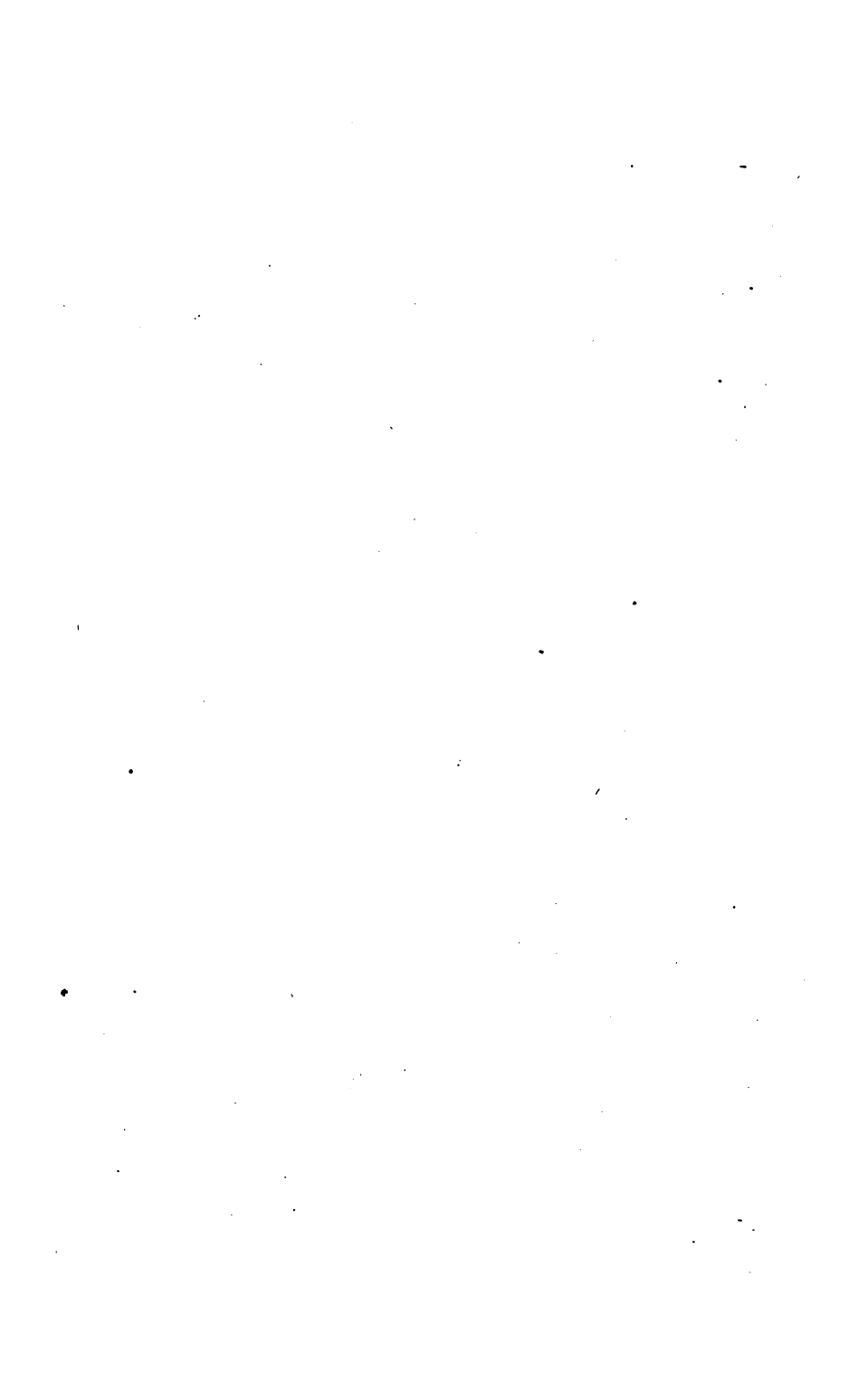
niece since her marriage, Aunt Mary was killed through a collision on the railway. Thus ended the life of the wicked Aunt Mary.



## CHAPTER IV.

### *ERNEST, THE WANDERER, IN VICTORIA.\**

\* Each colony and place named were personally visited by the traveller, and the notes taken from actual observation.



(*Letter 9.*)

“Ballarat, Victoria,

“March 29th.

“EAR UNCLE,

“At this hour of the day  
in the colony of Victoria—  
three o'clock p.m.—I may fairly assume  
that my friends on the other (your) side of  
the globe are all in bed. Let me, there-  
fore, express a hope that one and all  
are in that happy state, both of mind  
and body, which will enable them not



only to sleep, but also to enjoy their slumbers.

“*Apropos* of sleeping—or rather a natural effect arising therefrom—I was last night *dreaming*. I dreamt of certain ‘forget-me-nots’ in the mother country. On waking, I asked myself the question : Are the absent ones still entitled to the floral distinction, or is the belief, like the vision of my dream, a mere illusion ? Be this as it may, they cannot be forgotten by the Wanderer, either by day or by night, or whether awake or asleep. This fact has just suggested another and (to me) still more important question : Assuming that during these their curtained hours at home, my friends are all asleep, I wonder whether any *one* kindred spirit among the number is at this moment dreaming of the exiled Ernest ? But

before saying another word on a subject nearest the heart, yet farthest from the present path of the Wanderer, I will proceed to furnish you with the local or historical portion of my colonial sheet.

“ Having completed a tour of nearly five months’ duration in this colony, I am not quite certain whether I shall proceed from Melbourne to Sydney, or from Geelong to Hobart Town—i.e., from Victoria to New South Wales, or from Victoria to Tasmania. Being continually on the move from one place to another, it would be a difficult thing to name a spot where a letter from home would be likely to reach me. Patience must, therefore, make me content to wait for news till my return.

“ Voluminous have been the notes taken during my wanderings through this remarkable region. I am glad to think

you did not expect me to send all my sketches by post, as it would have occupied a very long time to transcribe them from my note-book. The Governor\* told me that the statistics furnished from official sources would convince my friends that modern history affords no other instance of a rise from insignificance to a great commercial community like that which has taken place in the colony of Victoria during the space of five-and-twenty years. There can be no doubt whatever that, with industry and sobriety, the working classes from England—to whom a brief reference will presently be made—may here rise in the world at a much more

\* Through the influence of the Wanderer's uncle, he was (before leaving England) supplied by the Secretary of State for the Colonies with letters of introduction to the Governors of Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand.

rapid rate than that prevailing in the mother country. But with regard to my individual and humble *self*, I have no wish to become *acclimatized* through a lengthened residence. Apart from the golden position, the successful past, and the promising future of this wonderful colony, *my own* impression of the country, the climate, and, I may add, the community at large, is the reverse of favourable. They are not inviting to any one with the least pretension to a refined or cultivated taste. At all events, I am not likely to shed a tear because the hour of my departure is at hand.

“The majority of those who leave England for Australia are not over fastidious concerning either the beauties of the country, the climate, or the quality of the society. That majority is composed of a

very miscellaneous gathering. Among the number there are many whose society, on various grounds, would be undesirable in a country they quitted rather from necessity than choice. But on these and other points, the persons mostly required here are not over particular. Mechanics, servants, and labourers do not usually inquire into or concern themselves about the character or antecedents of those born in a higher station of life, so long as their own interests are not affected thereby. With double or treble pay for their labour, they can obtain food at about half the English price. Thus they have reason to be satisfied, and they usually are so, although in some cases their employers have reason to be dissatisfied with *them*.

“Notwithstanding repeated warnings, both by the English and Australian press,

young people who are *not wanted* here continue to arrive by every ship. Clerks and warehousemen in search of situations—unless they have the physical strength and disposition for drudgery unbecoming their position and education—have often to endure great mental suffering and severe bodily privations.

“A word or two about domestics in this part of the world. Ladies in England are apt to complain of the scarcity of servants, and the difficulty of getting *good* ones. Twelve months’ colonial experience would enable them to regard their home troubles as comparative blessings. A lady in the colony of Victoria may be suddenly called on to represent not only her own character in the house, but also that of cook or housemaid. In certain cases—like that I am about to name—she may have

to represent the three characters at one and the same family entertainment; and the rapidity with which the costumed transitions are effected, appear as marvellous as the mechanical transformations in a pantomime.

“ A few days ago I dined with a gentleman in a small township who happened to be a lawyer, and one of the leading men of the place. The absence of his wife before the dinner-hour was fully accounted for at a subsequent period of the day. She had cooked the dinner and dished it up. The man-servant (i.e., the lawyer's clerk) placed the dinner on the table; but between the dishing-up and serving-up, the hostess had thrown off her cooking costume, and now took a seat at table in time to ask a blessing on the repast. After dinner the lady favoured us with a

little vocal and instrumental music, and then retired for half an hour to resume her duties in the kitchen. Immediately she had again joined us in the drawing-room, the result of her absence became apparent, by the man-servant (the utilised clerk) putting in an appearance with a tray, on which he handed round tea and coffee.

“Now, although this happy married couple had before been *without* servants for three months at a time, yet on *this* particular occasion they were *supposed* to have both a cook and a housemaid. But cook and housemaid happened to be each engaged. The cook had gone to bed *decidedly drunk*, and the housemaid had gone out for the day with a digger, to whom she was engaged to be married in a month. I will merely add that the wages of the housemaid were thirty pounds a



year, and those of the cook ten pounds a year more, and 'all found.'

"Melbourne, the capital of the colony, is in many respects a remarkable place. Its leading features are duly registered in my note-book. I will, therefore, in the present brief notice, merely observe that some parts of the city, with their numerous grand, and well-filled shops, bear a striking resemblance to streets in any English town of similar dimensions. But the bonded and other stores in the Victorian capital are, of course, more numerous and extensive than those in a moderate-sized English city or town. The city lies very flat, but the streets have been wisely—and most conveniently for strangers—laid out at right angles. As a mere place of residence, the town of Geelong, with its fine open sea-bay, is in my opinion preferable to Mel-

bourne. But the trade of the former is insignificant compared with that of the latter.

“During my stay in Melbourne the city was suddenly visited by one of those periodical and atmospheric phenomena which are apt to shake the nerves even of well-seasoned colonists, who are not easily disturbed by *trifles*. The visitor in question is what they term a ‘hot wind.’ And to what shall a ‘hot wind’ be likened? It cannot be compared to anything else on earth, and no one, I presume, would dare to liken it to anything *above*, although any imaginative spirit might be justified in comparing it to something *below*. Terrified sinners, unaccustomed to this heated blast, might, on the first visitation of a ‘hot wind,’ really suppose that they were drawing near to a certain fiery region, or

at least, that such region was drawing unpleasantly near for their own convenience and comfort. With the air actually dark with dust, flies, and smoke, and with the heat of the blast at a degree that would lead a stranger to suppose himself within ten yards of a 'burning fiery furnace,' I can imagine nothing more horrible, except that of being in the furnace itself.

"We have just had *another* atmospheric change peculiar to this part of the world. Not a drop of rain had fallen in the colony for nearly four months. The land was parched, the pastures dried up, the cattle were starved, and bush fires were raging in all directions. But now for the transition. Three days ago the clouds began to open their long pent-up reservoirs. For four-and-twenty hours down came a continuous torrent, that carried almost everything

before it. Cattle in the valleys that had not been starved to death were now drowned, and several human beings perished in the flood. The downpour was heavy enough not only to extinguish the fire in frail structures and dwellings, but to carry away structures, dwellings, and all. Such are a few of the *trifles* to which people are subject in this golden and money-making region.

"I have been *once* to a state ball at Government House, but have no desire to go again. The cost of a conveyance (two pounds) to get there, the crowd and confusion on getting there, and the absence of an attractive (to *me*) partner *when* there, made the affair a colonial curiosity in 'high life,' rather than an enjoyable entertainment.

"So far as my present colonial expe-

rience extends, I infinitely prefer life in the 'bush' to life in town. Although in some parts of the thinly-populated interior one may have to 'rough it' a little, yet the natural features of the scene are far more inviting than the unnatural ones arising from artificial display on the part of vulgar and illiterate people. Good society can no doubt be found in Victoria, although the area for its discovery is very circumscribed.

" Among the dainty (?) dishes of which I have partaken since my arrival in the colony, I will name a couple of very choice ones that were placed on table at the house of a large squatter with whom I dined. We had kangaroo-tail soup and a wild turkey. Although these might not be deemed luxuries in England, I assure you that—to *my* palate—they were both of a

most excellent flavour. The soup was quite equal, if not superior, to ox-tail, while the turkey was delicious. Strange to say, the colour of the meat was the very reverse of that in a tame turkey—the breast being a pale brown, and the legs white. But wild turkeys and kangaroos, like the aboriginal tribes, are getting very scarce, and are only to be found a long way in the interior of the colony. In place of these, however, the colonists have a live stock they so long desired—i.e., English rabbits, or rather a countless multitude of colonial descendants of the English settlers. These the importers thought would prove a blessing; but they now find them so much the reverse, that they would gladly get rid of a yearly-increasing ‘pest,’ by which a large portion of field produce is eaten or destroyed.

“I must now conclude by asking you to convey my kind remembrance to those who still remember me. On the day of my departure from England, a note from sister Maria informed me that brother Ruby was really engaged to a young lady, of whom *you* had a very high opinion. Should he marry before my return, I trust the union may be productive of every possible blessing to be derived from so important an event. But as Maria in her letter said she had resolved *never to marry*, I hope she may continue to enjoy her single state of blessedness.

“Please also to convey my regards to the Widow Bland and her daughter, Rosa. To any *other* inquirers—should *any* trouble themselves to inquire for me—you will be good enough to say that my motto still remains, ‘Faithful, though

absent.' With this assurance, you will believe me your dutiful, though wandering nephew,

“ ERNEST.

“ Colonel Stone, C.B.”

NOTE.—Six months are supposed to elapse between this and the succeeding chapter.







## CHAPTER V.

### *GATHERING CLOUDS.*



**I**T has been said that “perpetual sunshine would not be duly appreciated.” Yet this remark does not surely apply to any sunny path in the limited circle of human bliss? Favoured spirits on that happy course would hardly desire *stormy* weather, with a view of being able more fully to enjoy the serenity of a calm? But these questions may be left for the consideration of philosophers, while a matter-of-fact recorder proceeds with the history of a young

married couple, who had no desire whatever for any change in that happy state of existence which they had enjoyed since the day on which they were united as man and wife.

Stability in human affairs is as uncertain as the weather. An unfavourable change may take place at any moment, or at a moment when least expected. Eight months of uninterrupted happiness have been enjoyed by Ruby Stone and his social partner. There is also a visible prospect that at an early date a living token of love will bear witness to the conjugal felicity of the founders. Yet at this early and auspicious period in married life the gathering clouds furnished signs of an approaching and unpleasant change. Budding shoots of sorrow already promised to bear some of the bitter fruit of

Aunt Mary's secretly planted seeds of evil. The former lover of a devoted young wife was not at present aware that he had for ever lost, through marriage with another, the idolized object of his affection. Futile indeed would be any attempt to describe the rayless gloom that suddenly overshadowed the mind of Ruby Stone's sensitive young wife on the receipt of the following letter :—

“ Calcutta,

“ February 15th.

“ MY DEAR MABEL,

“ I returned here yesterday from Madras, and received, for the first time, a couple of *thunderbolts*, in the form of two letters—one from yourself, and the other from sister Ellen.

“ On reading, without reflection, these

startling epistles, I was, as you may readily imagine, electrified by their contents. But a second perusal, supplemented by a little calm reflection, prompts me to say, '*What's the object?*'

"Having duly considered that question, I will now state my conclusions. In the first place, I dare not do you the injustice to suppose that either the text or the design of your communication originated in your own innocent and unsuspecting mind. It seems to me that the object of the act is to test both my temper and my devotion. With this conviction, let me assure you, my dear Mabel, that neither my temper nor my devotion will be in any way affected by the severe shock on my nerves.

"By a few harsh words, entirely alien to your gentle nature, you imagine (?)

you have at once and for ever severed the tie that binds our honour. But, by a moral obligation more sacred than words, I shall consider that tie intact till it has been ratified by an act at the altar that will enable me to call you *mine*.

“I am quite aware, dear Mabel, that the affection on the *one* side has been much greater than that on the *other* side, or it may have been altogether on *one* side. Yet on my departure from England, did you not promise that you would *try to love me*?

“Having done nothing that I am aware of which would justify a change of sentiment, much less a revulsion of feeling on *your* part, I have every reason to hope and believe that, on my return home, you will accord a warm greeting, if not an affectionate recep-



tion, to your still faithful and ever devoted

“CHARLES BOND.

“Miss Mabel Wood.”

A far greater “thunderbolt” than that which Mr. Bond received he had now, by his own hand and with withering force, unconsciously hurled at the devoted head of his lost Mabel. She might withhold the contents of the letter from the knowledge of her husband, but could she effectually conceal or disguise her feelings on the subject? Impossible. And believing it to be impossible, the agitated young wife at once sought advice from one whom she regarded (next her husband) as her best and most esteemed confidential adviser—the late Widow Bland, now Mrs. Stone.

Colonel Stone, with his family, had returned from Paris, and again occupied his London mansion. His wife, on the receipt of a letter from Mabel, enclosing that from Mr. Bond, made her husband acquainted with the whole affair. The colonel declared—as any sensible person would declare—that Mabel had been badly advised by her Aunt Mary, and that she had made a trifle become a serious matter after marriage, merely by its previous concealment. The colonel's wife, like her junior namesake, happened to be in what ladies term “an interesting situation.” In each of the present cases, the “situation” was quite as interesting to the husband. Yet the colonel readily assented to his wife's proposition for a week's absence from home, in order that she might proceed to Chestnut Hall, and, if

possible, relieve the anxiety of one who was almost as dear to her as her own daughter.

Mabel at first thought she might find some slight relief by making her trouble known to Pinfold, her maid, who still occupied a high place in the opinion of her young mistress. But remembering the distress of mind Pinfold had before suffered through the mere mention of Mr. Bond's name, Mrs. Stone resolved that her maid should know nothing concerning the mental anxiety of her mistress, beyond that which could not be entirely concealed from view.

The morning after the arrival of Mrs. Stone at Chestnut Hall, Ruby happened to be busily engaged on his scientific studies in his new observatory. Thus favoured, the ladies had an excellent opportunity

for a private and calm consideration of the subject at present behind the scene, and the conference was not long delayed.

"It is really too bad of me, mother,\* to make you thus the innocent sharer of my present trial," said Mabel, in a serious tone and with a corresponding expression of countenance.

"Well, Mabel, dear," replied Mrs. Stone, senior, with a smile, and in a manner calculated to raise the spirits of her depressed namesake, "I candidly confess that for a few moments after the receipt of your letter and its *bonded* inclosure, I did wish you had not made me a hiding place for your secret. Yet, the wish was only momentary, and if I can now relieve your anxiety through a

\* This was deemed preferable to the title of "Aunt," by which a former impression had been created that was still the reverse of pleasing.

partnership, you shall not remain long without relief. But what will be the best course to pursue, my child ?”

“ *That*, mother, is just what I am at a loss to know.”

“ I suppose so,” was the reply. “ And it is the very point on which it will be difficult for me to advise you. But tell me, Mabel, would it not ease your mind, if I were to break the matter to Ruby at once ?”

“ He might be annoyed at my having withheld it from him so long,” replied Mabel despondingly.

“ But longer concealment may tend to increase that annoyance,” said Mrs. Stone, senior.

“ Yet, would it not be cruel to vex so good, so kind a husband ?” inquired Mabel with tears in her eyes.

"Very cruel, indeed, my dear," was the reply. "But the good qualities you so justly extol, would prevent a considerate husband from being vexed by any misfortune that was not of your own creation."

"I cannot, I *dare not*, dear mother, blame others for a sin I have made my own through adoption," said Mabel, with a sad, yet significant shake of the head.

"My dear child!" warmly exclaimed the adviser, "if you are going to take on *your own* shoulders the sins of other people, you cannot expect to escape the penalty. We had better, therefore, say nothing to Ruby about Mr. Bond's letter, for when the writer discovers you are married he will hardly—if he is a sensible man—trouble you again on the subject."

"Is that *your* opinion, dear mother?" cheerfully inquired Mabel.

“It is,” was the reply. “But should you give way to despondency, or trouble *yourself* any more in the matter, you will vex me exceedingly.”

Suddenly springing from her seat, Mabel ran and embraced one whom she regarded as a mother. “I wouldn’t vex you for the world, and I am sorry you cannot be always with us, for my happiness would then be complete.”

“Oh, my child!” said the motherly visitor. “You will shortly, I hope, be blessed with a greater, though a *little* comforter, and when we get over our approaching trials you must come and stay with us for a while. I should like to have been with you at the trying moment, but you are fortunate in having a maid that is so competent and attentive. Pinfold’s services will prove of the

utmost value to you in a time of sickness."

"Pinfold is very able and very attentive," replied Mabel. "But I could not consult her on the subject we have just been discussing, relative to my former and unfortunate connexion."

"Of course not, my dear."

At this moment Ruby entered the room, and the current of conversation immediately took another course.








## CHAPTER VI.

*A GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE.*



 HERE is at length a distant prospect of the mysterious Pearl becoming a little *less mysterious*.

In the midst of that prevailing darkness in which her history has been so long shrouded, a faint gleam of light, like the first silvery dawn of day, is now perceptible. Within door and without, there are visible signs of new life. In every movement there is an active and evident proof that the visionary past is about to be succeeded by realities that may tend to furnish either a strong

indication or slight glimpse of the future.

Pearl, with her guardians, and two competent servants, comprise the living occupants of a beautiful villa residence in Derbyshire—a tenement purchased for them by the governing and guiding spirit of a mystery of seventeen years' duration. But a great change is drawing near. The residents of this beautiful villa are attired in deep mourning, as a solemn record of a family event that had long been expected. Three months hence Pearl will throw aside those outward symbols or personal tokens of sorrow which are too often displayed without any corresponding tone of grief within.

For the coming change from quietude and seclusion, to the gaiety inseparable from fashionable or "high life," tutors for

the young novice are already on the move. Preparatory lessons necessary for such a social transition are now taken by the fair student who will shortly be subject to the critical observations of fashionable loungers, old and young, of either sex. Pearl not only had a beautiful horse sent to her by her *still distant* papa, but she receives instructions in horsemanship by a competent professor. Mr. and Mrs. Belman have received instructions to seek for the approval of their ward a maid of unblemished character and in every way qualified for the duties of a personal attendant, when called on to accompany her young mistress to her future home. Pearl's attainments in the primary branches of education would enable her both to fill and adorn an exalted position in life. She can speak French and Italian fluently, and German a little. She

is a good pianist, and by no means a bad vocalist. But in the upper circles of society there are certain conventional forms by which Pearl may at first be a little disconcerted or perplexed. On some of these she is now enlightened, as a requisite prelude to her passage from comparatively humble apartments to the gilded *salons* of the great.

“Well!” said Pearl to Mrs. Belman, as she entered the room in her riding habit, and with whip in her hand, after her morning exercise on the recently acquired charger; “is it not strange that one’s ideas with regard to certain things in life may soon be turned inside out? Six months ago, had any person assured me that I should some day be fond of equestrian exercise, I might have been bold enough, or silly enough, to contradict

them. Yet there is nothing I now enjoy more than a good canter over the downs. Is it not strange?"

"Not at all strange, my dear," replied Mrs. Belman. "In six months time there may be many *other* strange things that you will enjoy quite as much as a good canter on horseback."

"Pray name them?" said Pearl, who was on the point of leaving the room, but now returned, and took a seat without changing her costume. "Riding, you know, is a noble and healthy exercise; but I am quite sure I shall never enjoy those formal dinner-parties, those grand balls, or those stately receptions you have so kindly and clearly marked out for me."

"With fresh associations, my dear, you will find customs that will soon extinguish the taste for old things, by creating a love



for new ones. And I'm inclined to think, Pearl, that with *your* lively disposition and buoyant spirits, there will be less difficulty in the matter than with one of a more serious turn of mind."

"A willing convert, you think, from a natural to an artificial life, or from prudence to folly?" said Pearl, with a laugh. "It *may* be so, yet with regard to certain persons, near and distant, my mind will *never* change."

"Are you *sure* of that, my dear?" inquired the guardian in a serious tone.

"As sure as I am that this is Monday," was the emphatic reply.

"After that assurance, Pearl, I will make you acquainted with the result of my husband's visits to Paris and to Chestnut Hall," said Mrs. Belman. "Though he was unable to ascertain either the

address of the wanderer, or to discover any source through which a letter would be likely to find him, he has satisfied himself that Ernest is in love."

"Yes?—and with whom?" inquired the ward with eager and anxious expectancy.

"Don't be impatient, my dear, and you shall have the episode in regular order. It would appear that, in some respects, your first Valentine is as great a mystery to his friends as you *have* been, and still *are*, to him."

"In what way has he made himself so *very* mysterious? Do tell me quickly—skip over a little of the waste," said Pearl impatiently.

"Very well, my dear," continued Mrs. Belman. "To lessen your anxiety, I'll come to the heart of the subject at once.

You must know, then, Pearl, that the friends of Ernest have been unable to ascertain anything concerning his love or the loved one, except in the form of an allegory or riddle, which he has left them to decipher or solve after their own fashion or fancy. It is *supposed* that he has imprudently formed an attachment for some very poor girl."

"A *poor* girl?" said Pearl, in surprise.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Belman, "a girl that cannot at present write her own name."

"A girl that cannot write her own name!" said the ward, in still greater surprise. "Why should he lead his friends to *suppose* such a thing as that? What's the object?"

"The object, my dear, is perfectly clear. He is unable to enlighten his

friends on the subject, and has therefore no wish to deceive them. Such, after due consideration, is the conclusion arrived at by my husband. Don't you comprehend the object *now*?"

Pearl shook her head.

"No?" said the guardian with a laugh. "I should have thought you a more apt scholar with such a parable. But a personal question will lead you to an immediate solution. Tell me, can Pearl—the *precious* Pearl, as she has been called by her lover—can she, at the present moment, write *her own* and proper family name?"

"Oh, oh! Is that it?" said the ward with a loud laugh. "But you are quite aware that, without having to go to school again, I shall soon be able to write my own and my *correct* name?"

"*We* are aware of it, my dear," was the reply. "But the exiled Ernest is, of course, entirely in *the dark* on the subject."

"I suppose so," said the ward in an angry tone. "But had he not been again and again strictly forbidden to correspond with me——"

"Pearl, my dear," interrupted the guardian, "you would not, I am sure, have wished us to disregard the sanctity of a solemn trust? Had such a thing as a secret correspondence between you and Ernest come to the knowledge of your papa, my husband would for ever have forfeited his good [opinion—an opinion your adviser has now enjoyed for nearly twenty years. You know we would gladly forward your views concerning one between whom there is an ardent and

mutual affection; but for your *own* sake, Pearl, it is well to be cautious, more especially as the chances of unity are so distant and so doubtful."

"Yet I would give the world—yes, I would even part with my beautiful horse—in exchange for a little note, one little note of remembrance, from the long absent Ernest."

"It seems, then, that although unable to correspond with you, the dear fellow has anticipated your wish by sending you a message," said Mrs. Belman.


"A message for *me*?" anxiously inquired the ward.

"A message for *you*, Pearl," continued the guardian. "In a letter to his uncle, he requests that any inquirer who may feel an interest in him is to be assured that his motto still remains, '*Faithful, though*

*absent.*' Here then, my dear, is a message intended, no doubt, for that poor girl who can only at present—like some illiterate waif—sign her name by a cross, or under the figurative *incognito* of a Pearl."

The effect of this unexpected message was electrical. An instant and overwhelming sensation of joy prevented any immediate response, beyond the tears that trickled down the cheeks of the delighted maiden.

Mrs. Belman, on observing an approaching visitor on the lawn in front of the house, at once left the room, in order to prevent the intrusion of a stranger at such a moment. Pearl, in the absence of her guardian, soon regained her self-possession. But she immediately began to soliloquize on the subject that had so suddenly touched a sensitive chord in her feelings.



“‘*Faithful*, though absent!’ such is the motto of the wanderer, and such—should we never meet again—will be *my* motto till death. ‘*Faithful*, though absent.’ That message would alone have won my heart, had it not been already won. ‘*Faithful*, though absent.’ Three volumes in three words. I wonder whether every fiction contains a motto with a noble sentiment? If so, I shall become as fond of novel-reading as I am of horse-riding.” (At this moment the spot where the speaker was seated at the window was illumined by a brilliant ray of sunshine.) “‘*Faithful*, though absent.’ An assurance of constancy now reflected by that glorious sun that is ever—*Faithful*, though absent.’”







## CHAPTER VII.

*ERNEST, THE WANDERER, IN  
TASMANIA.*





## CHAPTER VII.

*ERNEST, THE WANDERER, IN  
TASMANIA.*



(*Letter 10.*)

“Hobart Town, Tasmania,

“September 30th.

“EAR UNCLE,

“An English lady of good position and means—Meredith, I think, was the lady's name—many years ago took up her residence in this beautiful island. She was so much delighted with her new abode that, in order to convey her impression of its varied attractions to friends in the mother country, she wrote a

book, entitled 'My home in Tasmania.' I have not seen that work, yet nothing the author could say in favour of the colony would exceed my own humble, but high opinion of its charming features. 'Perfection,' says a celebrated writer, 'is a word that cannot be justly applied to anything on earth.' Had the writer not included himself in such a declaration, my faith in his opinion would, if possible, be less than it is : for I am assured—and I am disposed to accept the assurance as a fact—that anything that can be grown in any part of the world may be grown to *perfection* in Tasmania. It would thus appear that a word so often applied to the *climate* of this colony is not an inappropriate one, after all.

“Why such a delightful Island—under its original title of Van Diemen's Land—

should in the first instance have been selected as a convict settlement is a matter I am at a loss to understand. Possibly, the selection was made with the philanthropic view of improving constitutions previously impaired by dissipation and vice.

“The scenery in the lake districts and around the coast is grand in the extreme. In some parts it is superior to anything I have seen in the United Kingdom. Unlike the arid pastures, or ‘sheep runs’ in Victoria, the country is beautifully green and well watered. It abounds in springs and running streams, which present a striking contrast to the stagnant pools of the colony I last explored.

“The surplus farm produce not required by the inhabitants of Tasmania is chiefly sent to, and finds a ready market in Vic-



toria. It would appear that, the early settlers who had land and convict labour for *nothing*, expected everything else on the same easy terms. Without expending a shilling in manure, they drew their crops from the land for seven or ten years in succession, and when they had impoverished the virgin soil they abandoned those spots for others which had not been subject to the same exhaustive process.

“ The case is now altered. Neither land nor labour can be had for *nothing*. The former may still be obtained at what might appear to English farmers a moderate rate, but there is much difficulty in obtaining the latter, even at a high rate. Here, as in Victoria, labour is the great want of farmer, or squatter.

“ By statistical information supplied from official sources I find that little or no ad-

vance has of late years been made in the material wealth or commercial progress of Tasmania. The same may be said with regard to population, which would appear to have been almost stationary. There is, comparatively, little gold in this island. That fact may in some measure account for its slow pace, compared with that of Victoria.

“Hobart Town is a lively and pleasant place, and by far the most important town in Tasmania. Launceston is a dull and uninteresting town, even more so than its sleepy namesake in Cornwall, from which, I presume, it takes its title.

“Regarded in its entirety, and apart from money-making considerations and a large calendar of crime arising from the remains of the convict element, Tasmania is a charming region. With its agreeable

society, with its beautiful climate, with its grand scenery, and with mutton and beef at fourpence and fivepence a pound, it may be very justly pronounced as a delightful place of residence, and in *that* respect, as superior to Victoria as the Isle of Wight is superior to the Isle of Dogs.

“Should it ever fall to my lot to be ‘cut off’ with the three pounds a week of which you say no one can deprive me, and should I (or *we*, if some ‘poor girl’ would join me) be compelled to seek a charming and, at the same time, an *economical* spot for a sunny abode, the title of the book previously named—‘My Home in Tasmania’—might offer a suggestion worthy of adoption. Anticipating the bare possibility of being thus driven from the mother country, I may now

sign myself your dutiful but dubious nephew,

“TASMANIA.

“Colonel Stone, C.B.

“P.S.—Kindly assure brother Ruby and sister Maria that distance has not extinguished my brotherly affection, and should the widow Bland be *still* with you, please to inform her that I have not forgotten the highly esteemed housekeeper and daughter whom my mother on her death-bed solemnly enjoined me to *remember*. To any distant friend or inquirer, you will continue to say, that my motto has not been changed, but still remains, ‘*Faithful, though absent.*’ ”





CHAPTER VIII.

*THE COMING TRIAL.*





ONE trial is over ; another is at hand. The life of some people is a series of trials from first to last, or from the beginning of their earthly career to its close. They no sooner encounter and surmount one difficulty or trouble than another difficulty or trouble confronts them. Mental or bodily pain, in some form or other, is their daily companion. A pinch of this kind becomes doubly or trebly severe when brought about, not by any fault on



the part of the sufferer, but through evil doings on the part of others.

Excepting a joyful interval of six months' duration, Mabel Stone, the beloved and loving wife of Ruby, has secretly and silently suffered much distress of mind, even from the early dawn of womanhood. The effects of the bitter draught then administered by a cruel adviser were painfully felt at the moment a natural shoot of affection was budding forth from a heart that had been prematurely steeped in rue. The false step thus taken by Mabel was the handiwork of her departed Aunt Mary.

"The *evil* that men do *lives* after them,  
The *good* is oft interred with their bones."

So says England's most illustrious dramatic poet. And it is evident, from the

fact of no deed worthy of commendation being recorded, that whatever good Aunt Mary did in her lifetime must have been interred with her bones. But the *evil* lives after her. The niece has had a pleasing yet delusive dream that no further trouble would be likely to arise from her aunt's evil designs. The illusion is ended, and Mabel is now made to feel that the future may be darker than the past.

One trial is over : another trial is at hand. A joyful issue has been the result of the first trial, but, under any circumstances, a painful issue must arise from the second trial. Concerning the first, it is only necessary at present to observe that a lovely infant—a little girl now three months old—is just able to cheer the parental heart by a heavenly smile of recognition. Yet at this seemingly auspi-

cious moment, the loving mother of that smiling offspring is suddenly, as it were, felled to the earth by a second "thunder-bolt" from her former and rejected lover.

Charles Bond has returned to England. Disappointed love has provoked in him a spirit of *revenge*. This spirit may be attributed not entirely to the blow inflicted through the loss of his heart's idol, but partly to the summary mode by which that idol—at the dictation of Aunt Mary—had cast him off. He knew not till reaching his native land that he had been thrown overboard to make room for another.

Ruby Stone had fortunately left home for ten days, in order to take part in the proceedings of the "National Association for the Advancement of Science," the annual meeting of which was just about

to take place. The day after his departure, a strange visitor waited on his wife at Chestnut Hall. It was *not* Mr. Bond, her former lover, but a clerk from Mr. Bond's solicitor. The reader may naturally say, "What was the object of such a visit?" Did the visitor come with a letter from the enraged lover, demanding an explanation of the treatment he had received at the hands of one whom he had lost? No. He came to serve the unfaithful one with a writ, or legal process of action for

A breach of promise of marriage!

During the brief service of the notice, not a syllable was uttered by the bewildered Mabel. She was stationary, attentive and speechless. Yet immediately the messenger left the room she fainted. It might with reason be supposed that, on

her recovery of consciousness, the effect of so severe a shock on a placid nature would have deprived the sufferer of the power of action. Nothing of the kind. That potent, if not supernatural, spirit by which her sex is so often inspired in the hour of trial had already nerved every vein in the system of the gentle Mabel. For the time being, the lamb became a lion. The devoted wife and loving mother was suddenly, as if by magic, fortified from head to foot, in defence of her home, her husband, and her child. Depression had, for the moment, given place to power. It was not the thought of *her own* life—so dear to *others*—that roused her heart to instant action. It was the life, the happiness, and the peace of those so dear *to her*.

Colonel Stone, who married the widow

Bland, had recently been presented with a son and heir. The infant was not yet three months old. Yet, on Mrs. Stone receiving intelligence of the trouble into which Mabel had been suddenly plunged by the legal process served on her by the solicitor of Mr. Bond, the colonel readily assented to his wife's wish to aid her young friend by timely sympathy and advice. She accordingly left town at once for Chestnut Hall, where she arrived the same evening.

"I never before knew you to rise at this early hour of the morning," said Pinfold, on entering the dressing-room of her mistress, in response to a ring of her bell. "Although last night you made no complaint of being poorly, I thought, by your look, that you were not quite well. Is there

anything you think of that would be likely to do you good?"

"Yes, Pinfold," replied her mistress, with a smile, yet in a manner the reverse of natural. "A little heart's-ease or head's-ease, or anything of that kind, might be of service to one who has been suddenly deprived of both, and would now be glad of either."

"I thought so," said the maid.

"Thought so? thought what?" quickly inquired her mistress.

"I thought yesterday when you were unable to partake of dinner, that the first short separation from master since your marriage had deprived you of your appetite."

"Ah!" exclaimed the young wife, with a forced laugh. "Suppose anything should occur to make that separation

a lengthened one? What then, Pinfold?"

"Really, ma'am," replied the puzzled maid, "I don't think there can be *much* the matter, after all. You would not, I think, be so very cheerful, if you were unwell."

"*Unwell*, Pinfold? What made you think of such a thing?" said the mistress, in a manner that tended to increase the doubts of the maid. "By an over dose of joy one may as quickly lose a taste for food as through an over dose of sorrow. Tell nurse to bring baby to me so soon as she is dressed, and should Mrs. Stone inquire for me before she appears at breakfast, you can say that I appear to be quite well this morning."

Mabel now proceeded to walk and meditate in the conservatory, after which



Miss Bond will convince her brother of the injustice of his present proceedings—convince him!" continued the speaker, with much warmth of feeling. "As an honourable man, he would not have required others to convince him, had you not in the first instance been badly advised by——, but let that pass. We cannot undo what has been done, but we may redeem a mistake by an admission of the error."

"I am quite aware that in accepting a love I could not reciprocate I wronged the lover," said Mabel with emotion. "But why should my husband be punished for this? Let the tormentor kill me for my crime, if the law will permit him to do so. But why should the innocent suffer for the guilty?"

"Ah, Mabel!" exclaimed the visitor. "As you cannot see, I will not lead you

to suppose that in *your own person* the innocent is at this moment suffering for the guilty. On my return to town your sister shall come to you, so that the result of my interview with Miss Bond may be known without delay. But you must compose yourself, or I will not answer for the consequences. If you set no value on your *own* life, pray think of your husband and the dear child."

A sudden and audible sigh of grief on the part of the young wife and mother touched a sympathetic vein in the visitor, and for a short time they kept company with each other in their tears of sorrow.





## CHAPTER IX.

*THE FINAL STRUGGLE.*





## CHAPTER IX.

*THE FINAL STRUGGLE.*



**I**N social life, a wicked or designing woman is capable of anything that's bad, and may thereby cause others an endless amount of trouble. On the other hand, a pure-minded and artless woman can accomplish *any* object, however great or noble the object may be.

The character of Miss Stanley—afterwards Mrs. Bland, and now Mrs. Stone—may be cited as a faint type of those of her sex whose unfeigned humility, gentle de-



meanour, and unselfish actions, have ever won, and will ever win, the admiration, esteem, or love of others—more especially of those around the particular circle in which their soothing influence is felt. Fearless and resolute in the time of danger to friends ; compassionate, kind, and attentive in the hour of affliction—these are the women who will continue to conquer the heart of man to the end of the world.

In history we often read an account of some heroic general who on the field of battle performed “prodigies of valour.” Yet on the homely path of love and labour, unrecorded deeds, as great and glorious as any in battle, are daily performed by the gentle hands and warm hearts of maidens, wives, and widows.

The wife of Colonel Stone has just fur-

nished a striking instance of woman's courage, persuasive power, and personal endurance in a time of trial. In flying to the rescue of her young friend and namesake, she has performed "prodigies" of love. Three times within three weeks she has travelled from London to Chestnut Hall and back. If, like the successful operations of some eminent surgeon, she should afford relief without being able to restore the patient to her former condition, the result must be attributed to the absence of vital power in the sufferer, rather than to want of skill on the part of the operator.

She has not only reconciled the rejected lover to his loss, but elicited from him an expression of regret that he should have threatened with an action a lady who has been "more sinned against than sinning."

She has made the husband of Mabel acquainted with the cause of his wife's trouble, and the husband has declared that his only annoyance in having been before kept in ignorance arises from the belief that he might have saved his poor wife from a moment's pain on the subject.

So far everything would appear to promise well. Peace on all sides has been proclaimed. But alas! Behold the *object* for whose benefit that peace has been secured. Her spirit is broken. The lamb that suddenly became a lion—the young wife and mother whose every vein seemed, as it were, trebly charged in defence of her husband, her infant, and her home—this lion-hearted lady has again become a lamb—a lamb without any of its former activity. Never did a strongly-fortified city after a bombardment, reveal so sad a spectacle as

that at present presented by the prostrated wife of Ruby Stone. From morn till eve she reclines on her comfortless couch. Yet from morn till eve, while drooping like an early-blighted flower, she can find gentle accents and smiles, that bring forth tears rather than smiles from those around. "Is she likely to recover?" This is now the ominous question that friends put to each other.

Maria Stone and Rosa Bland are both staying at Chestnut Hall, and are doing all in their power to cheer and comfort the prostrated Mabel.

"Happy innocent in the hour of childhood!" said Rosa Bland, as she entered the room with the infant of the invalid. "Unconscious of trouble, see how little Flora smiles on coming to see poor mamma!"

"You are an excellent nurse, Rosa," said the invalid. "I hope you may some day be blessed with a pet of *your own*."

"Your mamma says *blessed*, my beauty!" observed Rosa to the infant. "*Blessed*, indeed! if, *unlike* mamma, I should be able to nurse the darling."

"*Without* that power, great would be your misfortune," said the invalid. "Yet in *one* respect there will, most likely, be rather a remarkable resemblance between *my* case and that of dear little Flora."

"I don't exactly comprehend your meaning, Mabel," replied Rosa.

"Not comprehend, dear? You are quite aware I lost *my* mother before I was three months old?"

"Look at the beautiful flowers, darling,"

said Rosa, as she took the child to the window to avoid a reply. ,

“ I wonder whether, after *I* am gone, any kind friend will prove as much like a mother to Flora as *your* mother has been to me ?” inquired the invalid.

“ I hope, darling, your mamma is not going to drive us from the room,” said Rosa, with much emotion.

“ Ah !” exclaimed the invalid, with a deep sigh, “ people often display a want of proper consideration for the feelings of their best friends. But I’ll change the subject, Rosa. Don’t leave the room, but kindly hand me my little work-basket from the table.”

The basket was passed, and the owner took therefrom a small gold locket, containing a miniature likeness of herself.

“ Look here, dear. This is a *fac-simile*

of a little picture that was taken at the request of Ruby, and fitted inside the case of his pocket chronometer the day before our wedding. Well, Rosa, as human nature is a little selfish at every stage of existence, I feel sure, dear, you will pardon the motive that prompts me to beg your acceptance of this trifle. There, Rosa!" continued the donor, on conveying it to the hand of the recipient, who silently responded by placing the locket inside the bosom of her dress. "That little picture may some day induce you to take compassion and to look, as you have just been looking, with love and pity on a motherless child."

Overwhelmed with emotion, Rosa, on hearing some one open the door, hastily left the room with the child.

"This morning, Mabel," said the hus-

band, as he entered from the conservatory, "you very truly observed that 'outward appearances are sometimes deceptive.' I thought you were better, and those who have seen you consider your looks would justify my conclusion. But as your own feelings have induced you to pronounce an adverse judgment, I am reluctantly compelled to think lightly of the favourable opinion of others."

"I am *no* better, Ruby," said the wife, in a very marked manner.

"You never will be better, my darling, so long as you allow certain trifles to trouble you," replied the husband, on seating himself at the side of the couch on which his wife reclined. But I have good news—news that can hardly fail to cheer and comfort you. Your father has resolved to retire for ever from the turf.



His stud has been sold, and the estate is expected to pay nearly twenty shillings in the pound. In the event of a deficiency, I have promised to supply it, in order that the debtor may, without fear of arrest, be able to leave France for England. Your desire on that point will therefore be gratified; and within a month of the present time you may expect to see your long-absent parent at Chestnut Hall."

"Ah, Ruby!" exclaimed Mabel, in a thankful tone. "Never, surely, since the world began did an unfortunate wife possess so good, so generous, so noble a husband! You say papa will be here in a month? To a child in good health, a month may seem a short time to wait for a parental greeting after a long absence. Yet a month in *my* case——" (The speaker arrested her intended observa-

tion.) "There is another absent, and to me a personally unknown relative, in the person of our dear brother Ernest. I should like to have seen and spoken to him *once*, if only once in *this* world."

"At the expiration of his term of exile, he will no doubt return home," said Ruby. "We may therefore hope to see him in about nine months."

"Nine months?" repeated Mabel, sorrowfully. "Should little Flora live, she will then be just twelve months old. Your brother is sure to ask you the age of his little niece."

"He is more likely to ask that question of her mamma," was the reply.

"Yes, Ruby; but perhaps——"

"Come, come, dear Mabel," interrupted the husband; "we must speak of subjects likely to raise, rather than to depress your

spirits. Like little children at a repast who reserve a dainty mouthful for the last, I have a little bit of welcome news for your immediate enjoyment. Last week you intimated the pleasure you would derive from a brief interview with your reconciled friend Miss Bond. That lady heard of your desire, and also of your present sad state of health, and she at once expressed a wish to see you."

"Dear Ellen!" cheerfully exclaimed the patient. "How very kind of her, after the treatment she has received at my hands."

"As a personal proof of her kindness," added Ruby, "the young lady has just arrived at Chestnut Hall."

"Arrived, Ruby?" said the patient, in a tone of pleasurable excitement. "Do

tell her to come and see me, there's a dear husband."

"I will do so, Mabel; but, remember, you must be calm, or the visit will prove injurious rather than beneficial. I have been told that you were this morning imprudent enough to sit up and write a letter. Why did you not request me to write for you?"

"It was a letter that required to be written by my *own* hand. Forgive me, and it shall be the *last* time I will act in opposition to the wish of my husband."

The husband had scarcely time to salute his wife with a kiss, ere a gentle tap was heard at the door. Responding to an invitation to "come in," Maria Stone, followed by Ellen Bond, entered the room.

The invalid silently, but accompanied by a smile of welcome, raised her hand in

the direction of the visitor, who ran to the couch and affectionately embraced her friend without saying a word. Ruby and Maria retired from the room.

"Ellen," said the invalid, after a pause, "your presence here is in itself a heavenly assurance that my apology for the past has been accepted."

Deeply affected by the feeble and apparently sinking state of her friend, Miss Bond again embraced her in silence.

"Do not, dear Ellen, be distressed on *my* account," said Mabel, cheerfully. "Now I have seen you I may, perhaps, get better. Yes; I feel a little better already."

"If so, dear Mabel," said the visitor, feelingly, "the heartfelt apology I have to convey to you from my brother Charles, may still further cheer your spirits. He

desired me to say that had he previously known what he recently gathered from the kind-hearted wife of Colonel Stone, he would not have raised a finger, nor have uttered a syllable against you for the entire worth of the universe."

At this moment Charlotte Pinfold, the invalid's maid—unaware of the presence of a stranger, least of all of a stranger *supposed* to be her late mistress—entered the room from Mabel's *boudoir*. She carried in her hand a tray containing a wine-glass and a bottle of medicine, from which a draught was to have been taken by the patient.

Terrible was the shock on Pinfold's nerves caused by the presence of Miss Bond. Here was the innocent sister of an equally innocent brother, on whom the late Aunt Mary founded, and induced Pinfold

to practise, a case of gross deception. The sight of Miss Bond, sitting at the side of one by whom her brother had been rejected, produced a startling sensation on the mind of the approaching attendant. Her step faltered, her hand trembled, the medicine bottle and wine-glass dropped from the tray, and the bearer rushed from the room, without stopping either to gather the fragments of broken glass, or to wipe up the medicine from the floor.

“Dear me !” exclaimed the visitor. “What’s the matter ? Is the girl taken ill ?”

“She was no doubt surprised by the unexpected presence of her late mistress,” said Mabel. “I suppose she was not so easily excited when she lived with *you* ?”

“Lived with *me* ?” said Miss Bond.

“Charlotte Pinfold was at one time

*your* maid, was she not?" inquired her mistress.

"I never heard the name of such a person till now. She is an entire stranger to *me*, Mabel," replied the visitor.

"Indeed?" said the bewildered inquirer. "Did she never live in your brother's establishment, as a servant in any capacity?"

"Never!" was the reply.

A pause ensued. After this the distressed invalid said,

"Ellen, dear, I can see through it all. Kindly send Maria here, and come and see me again after dinner."

On discovering that Miss Bond had left the room, Pinfold, with features of ghastly hue, again entered.

"My dear young mistress——"

"Don't call *me* dear," said Mabel, with



all the force her strength would permit.

“Your Aunt Mary——”

“Silence !” interrupted the invalid.

“Then for heaven’s sake forgive me !” said the deceiver, as she fell on her knees at the foot of the couch.

By a determined effort, the invalid succeeded in partially raising herself on the couch, in order to give effect to the rising outburst from her excited feelings.

“Pinfold !” said her mistress, “you are fallen so low, the current of your career is so deep and dark with guilt, that *repentance* is your only hope of rescue. ‘*Forgive me !*’ you say. Yes ; if *my* forgiveness can drag you from your polluted course of life, you need not have fallen on your knees to obtain it. But you must cry for redeeming help to another. Go ! bend the knee and

sue for mercy *there*, till the hand of virtue has purified the stream, and raised you from the depths of your disgrace."

On hearing the approach of a stranger, the poor deluded tool of Aunt Mary, apparently agitated by a feeling of bitter remorse, rose to her feet, and, while sobbing aloud, hastily left the room. Her mistress now fell back on her couch, in a state of exhaustion.

On the entrance of Maria, the invalid, by a motion of the hand, signified a desire that she would seat herself near the head of the couch.

"Maria," she faintly uttered, "pray grant me a favour—it is the last I shall ever ask."

"What is it, my dear sister?" softly inquired Maria.

"You will find an answer on the outside of a letter now under my pillow," said

Mabel, as she moved on one side, while Maria drew forth an epistle that was enclosed in an outer and open envelope. "Look at the enclosure," said the writer.

Hereupon Maria took from the outer cover a letter sealed with black, and bearing the following superscription :

"For my beloved husband, Ruby Stone.  
"(To be delivered six months after my  
decease.)"

When Maria had partially recovered from the shock occasioned by the document, she faintly inquired,

"What—what's the object?"

"Look at the word on the outside cover," said the writer.

Maria thereon discovered, in large letters, the word "Secret." This induced

the reader to place the sealed letter in its outer cover, to close the envelope by means of the adhesive gum, and to conceal the document in the bosom of her dress. By a grateful smile of satisfaction on the lips of her exhausted sister, Maria already felt rewarded for her ready response to Mabel's wish.

She sat by her side in silence, believing that she was about to drop off into a refreshing slumber. But when the unclosed eyes of her sister appeared to be losing their lustre, Maria became alarmed, and she at once hastened from the room, in order to make her fears known to others. After the alarm, a sudden rushing to and fro by friends, and ominous whisperings by the servants, caused a commotion throughout the entire establishment.

In less than half an hour the cause of

the excitement, and subsequent silence, was proclaimed both within and without. The blinds of Chestnut Hall were suddenly let down, and the shutters were closed. The life of the mistress was ended. Mabel, the young wife and mother, was dead.

In this part of the story there is nothing new in the *moral*. It dates from the Christian era. Virtue has once more suffered for vice.

NOTE.—Six months are supposed to elapse between this and the succeeding chapter.



## CHAPTER X.

*ERNEST, THE WANDERER, IN NEW  
SOUTH WALES.*



(*Letter 11.*)

[“ Sydney, New South Wales,

“ December 26th.

“  EAR UNCLE,

“ By the date of this letter  
you will observe that twelve  
months have elapsed since I addressed  
you from on board the ship *Britannia*  
—then within a few days’ sail of Vic-  
toria.

“ Yesterday—Christmas-day—was duly  
honoured here. In one sense—an atmo-



spheric one—it was distinguished in a way the very opposite to that of any honour accorded to it in the mother country. We not only had a Christmas pudding, but we had the temperature at a degree of heat— $105^{\circ}$  in the *shade*—by which our pudding, like ourselves—in the sun—might have been cooked without an artificial fire.

“We are now approaching another and new year. Relating to friends at home, the past year, to Ernest, is a *blank*. Should any great or little events have occurred during its existence, I trust they may have conduced to the happiness of those who have taken part in them. Has Ruby married the young lady to whom he was engaged? If so, I presume he has set up an establishment of his own?

“I observe by the journalistic intelligence from *your* side of the globe, that

the Imperial dynasty of France has once more had to make room for a Republic. But in old England and Englishmen there would appear to be a little more stability of character than in France and Frenchmen. Is it not so? Being a novice in politics, it would be presumptuous for me to express an opinion of my own on the subject. Should I ever enter on the political arena, nothing less than the position of Prime Minister would satisfy my ambition. I will tell you why. As Premier, it would be contrary to *precedent* to accept from the crown a peerage for *myself*, but I might be justified in begging the sovereign to bestow the title of 'countess' on any *poor girl* to whom I may in time ally myself. There is, I think, a *precedent* for such a proceeding as *that*, is there not?

“Turning from home affairs to my colonial memoranda, I will now furnish you with a few notes relating to *this* part of the world. Leaving a detailed or statistical account of New South Wales till my return to England, I will briefly refer to two or three features of the colony that may prove interesting to a stranger.

“New South Wales, with the magnificent harbour of Sydney—one of the finest in the world—is the *older*, and, in some respects, the *finer* of the two leading Australian colonies. Victoria is by far the richer of the two in that ever attractive magnet—*gold*. But the climate of New South Wales has the *disadvantage* of being warmer than that of Victoria, while that of South Australia—which is *not*, I am happy to say, down on my visiting

card—is warmer than either. I am told that winter in New South Wales is a delightful season, and may be compared to a very fine October in England. The fair sex in this colony are considered at maturity at *fourteen*, and are regarded as old maids at *twenty-one*. But through the demand for the former, the latter may be deemed—unless of a very ordinary stamp—a *rarity*.

“The sea on this side the globe absolutely swarms with a sea monster known by the name of ‘shark.’ It is not safe for anyone to bathe in the splendid harbour of Sydney, except within an enclosure, by which the bather is protected from the chance of losing a leg or an arm, or perhaps legs, arms, and all together. I am also informed that the colony is not entirely free from the preying propensities of

an animal known as the 'land shark.' My personal knowledge of this voracious creature is happily confined to a single 'tug' at my pocket while wandering in the interior of the country. On this occasion I was charged fifteen shillings for a bottle of sour krout called claret—a mere *vin ordinaire*—which in England would be considered dear at fifteen shillings a dozen.

“To a visitor or new-comer there is *one* thing in some parts of Australia which, in summer, is even more intolerable than summer heat, *i.e.*, the *mosquito*. The want of sleep at night, caused by the buzz and bite of this tormentor, is by no means an agreeable addition to the discomfort occasioned by the oppressive heat of the day. Although the bed assigned to me in my present hotel is enclosed by a mosquito

curtain, yet two or three of the forbidden ones generally manage to get within the enclosure, and two or three are quite enough to keep a sensitive system in a state of agitation throughout the night.

“On this subject I will relate a laughable incident\*—at least it proved to be so to my companion on the occasion, who laughed till tears accompanied the movement.

“The captain of a regiment stationed in the colony, who took me for a trip into the interior, one evening adjourned to the station of a squatter, with whom we were to take up our quarters for the night. There was only one spare bed-room, but this contained two beds, which were gladly accepted by the captain and the wanderer.

\* An *actual* occurrence, truly described.

“The good lady of the station expressed a hope that our rest might not be disturbed by mosquitos, of which there was a large number in the house.

“‘They are not at all likely to disturb *my* rest,’ said the captain.

“‘But they are very likely to disturb *mine*,’ I added.

“‘I’m sorry for that, as we have no mosquito curtains,’ said the hostess ; ‘but in a box under the bed you will find an article which, if placed on your head, will enable you to rest in peace.’

“The lady omitted either to name, or to give a description of the article ; but in due time her visitors retired to their sleeping apartment, with the hope of securing the end in view.

“In certain movements a soldier is more expert than a civilian. It was so here.

My friend the captain was the first in bed. At the expiration of a few minutes—*supposing* him to be asleep—I was careful to avoid making a noise, and very gently withdrew a large bandbox from under my bed. That box contained an old-fashioned bonnet of enormous size. To this was appended a thin gauze veil. At the bottom corner there were strings for fastening the veil round and under the neck.

“No sooner had my head assumed the appearance of an old woman of a bygone age, than a noise of some kind disturbed the captain. He caught sight of the bonnet and screen, just as the wearer was on the point of getting into bed. The laughter that followed the discovery was something extraordinary. I thought my companion would never cease to ‘crack his sides,’ as people call it. Either he



continued to laugh in his sleep, or I slept and dreamt so. Every movement of my bonneted cranium, as I changed sides on the pillow, seemed to provoke a fresh *roar* from the occupant of the other bed. Thus, with an occasional doze, was passed the most remarkable night in my colonial wanderings. But when in the early morning I sat up in bed to withdraw my head and neck from the huge covering, the risible faculties of the captain were again in full operation. My friend was excited to an extent that caused him to dress hastily, beat a retreat, and solicit from the host a glass of soda-water and brandy, as a remedy for physical exhaustion.

“So much for a night with mosquitos. Their bite was successfully resisted by my bonnet and veil, but a laughing companion prevented that sleep which my female

covering would otherwise have tended to promote.

“To-morrow the steamer will sail in which my berth is secured for a passage to the last colony I have to survey. Having on both sides of the globe heard New Zealand highly spoken of, I anticipate the approaching visit with pleasure. I may therefore (in anticipation) sign myself, for the time being, your dutiful, though distant, nephew, a

“NEW ZEALANDER.

“Colonel Stone, C.B.”





## CHAPTER XI.

*RUBY, THE WIDOWER.*



“**I** BAIN’T gwain put up wi’ yu  
an’ yer slommikin’ ways ’bove  
a week or zo arter this, I can  
tell’e. Yu’m the biggest gawk in all Devon.  
I would’n a lost Dick’s letter—no, not for  
a bran new shillin’. Git along an’ look  
forad and back till you pick’n up, or yu’ll  
get no fried tatees wi’ yer tay, I can  
tell’e.”

The spirit thus roused to anger was that  
of Mrs. Fry, the lodge-keeper at Chestnut  
Hall. The cause of that anger was the

stupidity of a thick-headed girl, who had been sent to the village post-office for a letter, but who, on her return across the fields, lost the epistle through carelessness.

"You seem vexed this morning, Mrs. Fry?" said the wife of the head gardener, as she looked in on the "good old soul."

"That young hussy, Susy Hogg; as I'm a livin' craytur, her's enough to put a hangel out o' zorts. I zent her for the letter I always git the fust o' May—the letter from my nevvu, in California. Well, if her han't been an' lost the letter, why yu'm not the wife o' John Flowers."

"The letter won't be lost, Mrs. Fry," said the visitor.

"But he's lost *now*, I can tell'e," was the reply.

"Yes ; but some one will be sure to find the letter, and bring it to you," said Mrs. Flowers.

"I tould Susy if her did'n find'n, her'd git no tatees and bacon wi' her tay. Her'll fale that more an' a thump on her Hogg's head, I can tell'e."

"Mrs. Fry!" said the visitor in a manner denoting that something of moment was to follow, "did you see master and Miss Bland ride out on horseback *together* this morning?"

"I s'pose you main to zay, did I *notice* 'em? In course I did," was the reply. "An' I'm tould he's made her a present o' the pony that belang'd to poor misses."

"Well," continued the visitor, "had his mind not been engaged in the study of the stars, he would surely have fretted



himself to death during the last six months. But I'm glad to see he's been getting quite cheerful again since the arrival of his sister and Miss Bland. Haven't you noticed it, Mrs. Fry?"

"To be zure I have," said Mrs. Fry. "An' *yu* may tack my word for't that Miss Bland herzel is one o' them stars as the macester's a been lookin' at. One thing's *sartin*, I can tell'e *that*, Mrs. Flowers: I niver know'd a girl as was fond of squab pie that did'n mak' a *gude* wife."

"Here comes my husband, so I must be off!" said the visitor, who at once closed the discussion by her absence.

"'Twas a beautiful May, and a charming day!  
The songsters were warbling, the lambs were at play,  
When nature was smiling, and all seemed to say,  
'A season to love, and to drive care away!'"

With the great and glorious works of Nature smiling without, and with the fair forms of *human* nature smiling within Chestnut Hall, the foregoing simple lines might appropriately have been said or sung during the sunny period to which they refer.

“Come along, my little beauty!” said Miss Bland to the infant, Flora, as the nurse made her appearance with the child in the room in which the speaker and Maria were seated. “You must remain with us for half-an-hour this morning, you must, you smiling little cherub.” After taking the child from the nurse, the latter retired. “Pretty innocent! You little know or feel that it is just six months to-day since your poor mamma died, and that you then became a motherless child.”

“Dear me!” exclaimed Maria. “This reminds me of something that had for the moment escaped my memory, although I thought of it last night and again this morning when I awoke. You must excuse me for running away for a short time, Rosa.”

Maria left the room the moment her brother—whom she wished to see in private—entered. She therefore retired, to await his presence in another apartment.

“What? Rosa again nursing my little Tottlekins?” said the papa, with a smile.

“For shame!” was the reply. “I won’t allow Flora to be called such an ugly name. It would be unbecoming, even if you were able to toddle, would it not, my pet?”

“But I’ve been told that girls, in their forward movements, are usually in advance

of boys? If so, ought not one whom you pronounce *perfection* to walk at nine months old?"

"Are you joking, Ruby, or would you have an infant prodigy in little Flora? She will do well, should she be able to walk before the close of her first year."

"Oh! is that it?" continued the parent. "The point, I admit, is hardly within the pale of scientific research. But I am seeking a little information relating to *natural* objects, and on this subject you will, I am sure, pardon me for asking *another* question. You have been heard to declare that you are as fond of Flora as if she were your *own* child. If it *be* so—and I have no reason to doubt, but every reason to believe that it *is* so—would you, Rosa, in the course of time, have any objection to adopt your favourite?"

"I don't exactly 'understand you," said Rosa. "If I were married and had no children, I should then be delighted to have little Flora with me. But surely, Ruby, you would never consent to part with the darling?"

"*Never*," was the reply.

"Yet how could you avoid a separation, if I were now to adopt her?" inquired Rosa.

"Simply by your adopting her papa at the same time," replied Ruby.

"You are joking again," was the blushing response.

"Indeed, indeed, I seriously *mean* what I say; and I would have you thus regard my meaning. Having duly considered the matter, I have arrived at the conclusion that you would greatly conduce to the happiness of parent and child, by taking both."

After kissing the child she carried in her arms, Rosa indirectly replied to the parent through an address to the infant—

“Candour, my darling, compels me to inform your papa that I am unable to accept either.”

“Alas, then, for the dispersion of my hopes!” said the disappointed suitor. “I should not have introduced the subject for another six months, only that I resolved to be *first in the field*, in order, if possible, to secure the object of my heart’s desire. There may, of course, be personal objections unknown to your suitor, but as the baby does not form *one* of those objections——”

“There are *no* personal objections, Ruby,” interrupted Rosa. “I shall always regard you as any appreciative sister

would regard a kind and attentive brother. But——”

“That’s it, Rosa !” said the suitor. “*But* is the very word to express my meaning. You can regard me as you would regard a brother, *but*—the regard I seek should be warmer—infinately warmer—than that of a sister.”

“It *cannot* be,” said Rosa, in a serious tone, as she was on the point of retiring.

“Then let me salute baby before you go,” said the papa. “And as the kiss of a kind brother is not usually forbidden, it may not be objected to by sister Rosa ?”

Maria, who at this moment entered the room, exclaimed—

“Oh ! you are engaged. I have a message for you, Ruby ; but I’ll come again when you are *disengaged*.”

“Stay, Maria ; I am going.”

So saying, Rosa immediately retired with the child.

"Ruby," said the sister, "I want a word or two with you. Under a sacred and solemn obligation, I have a family duty to discharge relating to *yourself*."

"By all means discharge it, Maria," replied the brother, with a smile, and in the evident belief that the coming word had reference to the double salute that had just been witnessed by a *third person*. "Any word or words, however solemn, coming from a kind sister, will of course meet with the attentive consideration to which they are entitled."

"Well, Ruby," continued Maria, "six months have this day elapsed since a letter was placed in *my* hands for delivery in due season. Here it is."

"*Secret ?*" said the brother in consterna-



tion, as he took the letter and saw it thus marked on the outside cover. "And in Mabel's handwriting, too? Good heavens! What—what's the object?"

"Withdraw the enclosure, Ruby," said the sister. "*My* duty is now discharged, and the reverence in which I hold the memory of Mabel, will not permit me to go beyond her instructions."

Maria now left the room, and her brother soon discovered the enclosed letter to be thus addressed :—

"For my beloved husband, Ruby Stone.

"(To be delivered six months after my  
decease.)"

When Ruby had read the foregoing superscription, he quickly, and in a state of nervous excitement, opened the black-

bordered envelope, and withdrew and read the following epistle :—

“ Chestnut Hall,

“ November 1st.

“ MY DEAR HUSBAND,

“ This, the last letter you will ever receive from your first loving wife, will be placed in Maria’s hands for delivery, and she will no doubt faithfully discharge her duty at the appointed time.

“ Happy, although short, has been our married life. But alas ! the social union will soon terminate. Conscious of my many failings, I am still inclined to think that my absence may, for a time, cause a blank in your home that will be painfully felt by the disconsolate survivor.

“ With this conviction on my mind, shall I, on the eve of my departure hence, be

selfish enough to express a hope that the seat of my greatest joy on earth may never be filled by another? God forbid!

“Yet why should I wish you to marry? Here is my reason: I have no desire for you to pass in solitude a life capable of contributing to the happiness of another. But do not marry till you have discovered a genial spirit—one whom you believe to be in every way qualified to make you a suitable return for the manifold treasures of a noble and generous heart.

“Without the slightest wish to influence your choice, I will merely mention the name of our dear young friend, Rosa Bland. *She loves our little one.* You are aware of that? Well, Ruby, if Rosa could divide her love between parent and child, might she not be found a comforter to both?

“Another word or two, and I have done. May the second object of your affection be as devotedly attached to you as you have ever found your (now) rapidly sinking, yet still loving wife,

“MABEL.

“To her beloved husband, Ruby.”

As an instant and striking proof of the deep and touching interest created by the contents of this letter, Ruby sealed the close of its perusal by repeated kisses, while liquid globules—like dew-drops from a heavenly source—that fell from the eyes of the reader on to the saluted epistle, served as a silent tribute to the memory of the dearly loved, but departed writer.

Without a word of comment, Ruby again went thoughtfully through each paragraph of the letter. As he was doing

so for the third time, his sister Maria and Rosa Bland entered the room.

“Read *that* !”

So saying, Ruby placed his wife’s letter in the hands of Rosa, and hastily left the apartment.

After slowly, and with marked attention, reading the letter to herself, Rosa silently passed it to Maria. She then walked towards the window, in a very thoughtful or serious mood. But on Maria’s feelings the effect of the epistle corresponded with that produced on the mind of her brother. Excited by a sense of reverential joy, she not only kissed the letter, but honoured the memory of the writer by her tears.

“Well, Rosa ?” was the cheerful opening of Maria’s observations on the interesting document. “Of all the strange

incidents relating to your eventful life, this is surely the most remarkable. If I had any faith in spiritual manifestations, I should be inclined to think that dear Mabel was at this moment addressing you from her celestial abode. But what a thoughtful, considerate, and loving spirit must that have been that could prompt a letter like this! Here, dear Rosa, you have a little food for reflection. But how strange that Ruby this very morning should have addressed you on the same subject? Yet he could not have done so at an earlier date. Six months have this day elapsed since the death of his wife, and three months since the death of her father, Sir Wily Wood."

"At *first* I really thought that Ruby was joking," said Rosa.

"*Joking*, my dear?" continued Maria,

in surprise. "He would not be likely to trifle with you on such a subject. Some people are for ever joking, and their very existence would itself appear to be little better than a joke. But there is a vast difference between senseless levity, and natural vivacity. Some persons even in their serious moments exhibit a vein of humour that differs from a joke quite as much as the rich cream on pure milk differs from the blue tint in milk-and-water. The playful little word or genial smile of Ruby serves merely as a simple border of relief to serious matter. It is thus, as you well know, with his absent and lively brother. When on the eve of his departure from Liverpool, poor Ernest, in his humorous vein, declared that in the arms of Britannia he was about to be carried from the land of his birth, we all of us

felt the declaration to be something more than a joke."

"Poor Ernest!" sadly and solemnly exclaimed Rosa.

"With equal justice and sympathy, you may now add 'poor Ruby!'" said Maria, with a smile. "And you will not, dear Rosa, consider me joking in expressing a hope that my brothers may not prove like two stools, between which you will fall to the ground. On the contrary, I trust that between them you may be prevented from leaving our family circle."

"Really, Maria," said Rosa, with a laugh, "your remarks are more provocative of mirth than those of either Ernest or Ruby. But you are quite aware, dear, that *intentional* kindness on the part of friends may sometimes prove to be *unintentional* cruelty?"



"You must not be too sensitive on matters either unknown or unexplained," said Maria.

"Yet how can the monetary gifts of Ernest compensate me for the absence of a letter from the giver?" inquired Rosa.

"But you know what he said in the last letter to his uncle?" observed Maria. "These were his words: 'To any distant inquirer after me, you will please to convey the assurance that my motto still remains—*Faithful, though absent.*'"

"That was intended for *another*, not for *me*, Maria," replied Rosa, with marked emphasis.

"If, after due consideration," said Maria with hesitation, "you have really arrived at *that* conclusion——"

"What *other* conclusion *can* I arrive at,

Maria?" interrupted Rosa. "In the letter to his uncle, Ernest desired to be kindly remembered to the widow Bland and her daughter. He then requested that any distant inquirer might be reminded of his motto—'*Faithful, though absent.*' Was it *not* so, Maria?"

"It *was* so," admitted the respondent.

"Well, then," continued the inquisitor, "what is the natural inference? While Ernest has made me the unwilling recipient of his gold, there is evidently *another poor girl* with whom he has placed something of far greater value."

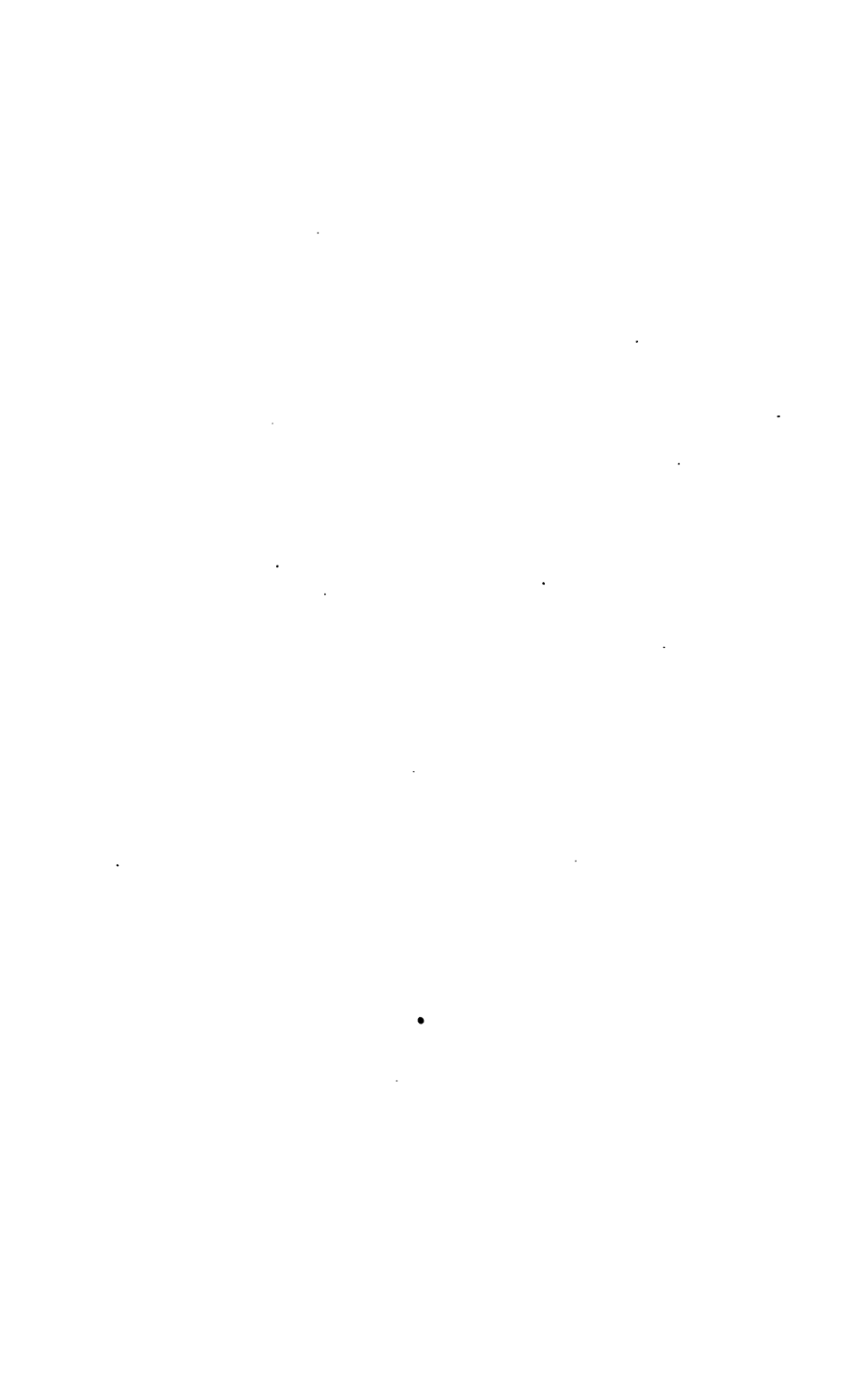
"To tell you the truth, Rosa," said Maria, in a significant manner, "I don't know *what* to think. His engagement with *you* is that each should remain single till the term of his exile has expired. As

the affair will then become an open question, you must patiently wait till the return of one who can alone assist you in coming to a decision.



## CHAPTER XII.

*ERNEST, THE WANDERER, IN NEW  
ZEALAND.*




(*Letter 12.*)

“ Canterbury, New Zealand,

“ July 30th.

“ DEAR UNCLE,

 “ I once either read a prediction or heard it predicted that ‘New Zealand would some day become the Great Britain of the southern hemisphere.’

“ *That* day may be somewhat *distant*. Yet I believe it to be in the womb of the future. There is everything to justify such

a belief. The climate—the very opposite to that of Australia—is all that could possibly be desired. Rivulets, running streams, and rich pastures, are everywhere to be found in New Zealand, while in the Australian colonies such things are rare exceptions. Even the aboriginal tribes—now nearly extinct—are among the most wretched race of natives on the face of the globe, while those in New Zealand—the Maories—are among the finest in the world. These, however, will play an insignificant part in the future of the colony, as their number is annually decreasing.

“Gold is now found in considerable quantities in New Zealand. Yet far more valuable than her mineral treasures, is the productive character of her soil, which readily yields from thirty to fifty bushels of

wheat to the acre. But here again—as in other colonies—manual labour proves to be the great *want* of the country—a want that tends to retard its still more rapid rise.

“Unlike Tasmania that has remained almost stationary, New Zealand is ‘going ahead’ at a good pace, and the speed would be greatly increased if the want just named could be easily and abundantly supplied.

“Having visited each of the six provinces, viz., Auckland; Taranaki (or New Plymouth), Wellington, Nelson, Canterbury, and Otago, I can truly say that they all appear to be highly prosperous. Differences of opinion among newcomers may exist with regard to the choice of any one province in preference to another, but there can be no difference of opinion concerning



the uniform success and increasing prosperity of *all* the provinces.

“Auckland was the former seat of government, and, for *my own* part, I prefer the town of Auckland to that of Wellington, the present seat of government. In the latter there are occasional slight shocks of earthquake, but none are experienced in either of the other provinces.

“Taranaki contains the smallest quantity of (available) land and the largest number of natives. In some parts of Nelson they have almost perpetual summer—summer of a delightful temperature, and flowers of various kinds may be grown in the open air all the year round. In Canterbury the residents are chiefly English, while those in Otago are for the most part Scotchmen. In Otago and the outlying southern districts—in which there are but few natives

—it is several degrees colder than in the north and middle islands.

“In territorial extent New Zealand is about the size of the United Kingdom, including Ireland. There is ample room for thirty millions of inhabitants, although the entire population of the colony is at present considerably less than the sixtieth part of that number. By this it would appear that the ‘future Great Britain of the southern hemisphere’ is yet in her infancy. But her attractions, even at this early stage, are so great that there is every prospect of her certain, if not rapid, rise to the age of maturity.

“I was yesterday surprised by the arrival at the hotel at which I am staying, of a Mr. Dean, a gentleman whom I met in Victoria, about eighteen months ago. He has come over here to purchase a little land, with a

view of settling in the colony. But you will naturally say, 'Who's Mr. Dean?' I'll tell you. He is a lucky digger. His history, however, will be best furnished by my relating an incident that will enable you to form an idea of the strange motives by which young men of entirely opposite stations in life are prompted to fly from their homes, and the equally strange manner by which, in Australia, such characters become not only connected in various schemes and occupations, but also, for the time being, completely reconciled to each other's society.

"During my interior wanderings in Victoria I happened to come across a party of four diggers. The chief of the party (Mr. Dean) on hearing that I was out from England on a *tour of inspection*, kindly told me that if I would like to descend a deep

pit, he should be happy to conduct me to the 'claim' of his party. Finding, by his conversation, that the coarsely-attired digger was a young man of education, I at once accepted his offer. After robing myself in suitable costume for mud and muddy droppings, I descended the deep pit that constituted the chief 'claim' of the party. Here I made myself fully acquainted with the digging operations of those who had been *exceptionally fortunate*, in fixing on a spot that fairly entitled them to the designation of 'lucky diggers.' On my ascension, or return to daylight, the chief of the party placed in my hands a beautiful nugget—about four ounces of pure gold—telling me to take it home for my sweetheart, *if I had one*. As a trifling return for such courtesy and kindness, I invited the chief and his three 'chums' to

dine with me at my hotel. It was here that their past history, the strange way in which they became connected, and their present good fortune were all revealed to me. The entire account, as related by themselves, would occupy too large a space in a postal communication, but an abridgment may be furnished in a few sentences.

“ My guests had all sailed from England in the same ship, although under different classes and conditions. When they left the mother country (three years ago) they were all under two and twenty years of age. Number one was the son of a baronet, had been educated at Cambridge, and classed as ‘tenth wrangler.’ Number two was the son of a solicitor; number three was the son of a cheesemonger, and number four was the son of a barber.

“The first left his friends and his native land because his parents *objected* to the young lady whom he had selected as his social partner in life ; the second flew from home in consequence of having made free with his father’s name and cash, in order to pay his losses on horse-racing ; the third left owing to a dislike to the family business for which he was intended ; the fourth—having no money—obtained a free passage in the capacity of assistant steward. On reaching their destination, these family, or social opposites, joined hand-in-hand, and proceeded in search of a spot on the diggings whereon to try their fortune.

“In this lottery the united four happened to select a prize, and good fortune had perhaps some weight in making them work harmoniously together. Number one,

without the least assumption of forward display on his own part, commanded that deferential respect from the others which was due to superior breeding, education, and personal bearing. They had divided about £12,000 between the four, and expected to realize a similar sum before their claim was exhausted. Their expectations were subsequently more than realized. I will merely add, that to such a prize as this at the diggings there are more than a hundred blanks.

“The chief of the party (Mr. Dean) has now quitted Victoria with the proceeds of his fortune—about £6000. In this more genial climate he hopes to obtain some land and turn his attention to farming. Should he succeed in finding a spot suited to his views, he intends to send home for the young lady

who was not suited to the views of his friends.

“A few words more will bring the wanderer’s mission to a close. With the prospect of leaving New Zealand in a fortnight, I may now, in the words of a well-known ballad writer, joyfully sing, as I direct my steps for

“ ‘England ! Home ! and Beauty.’

And, with my beautiful nugget of gold in *one* hand, I may with the *other* hand sign myself your dutiful nephew,

“HOMEWARD BOUND.

“Colonel Stone, C.B.”







## CHAPTER XIII.

### *THE WANDERER'S RETURN.*



**W**ELCOMED by his brother on his return to England, Ernest—contrary to his expectation—had not, on reaching London, arrived at the end of his journey. Colonel Stone and his wife were in Switzerland, and Ernest—in ignorance of the union that had taken place between his uncle and the widow Bland—was hurried off to his brother's beautiful seat in Devonshire. Here the visitor soon became familiar with *strange* events of the past—events of a

diversified character, and pregnant with incidents both of a sad and joyful nature. During his absence from home, the life of an unknown sister had passed away. He was thus reminded of the changes constantly taking place among all things mortal in this beautiful world. Yet in a lovely little orphan child—now twelve months old—he was at the same time reminded how, by the successive shoots of nature, the world is for ever kept in full bloom.

Maria and Rosa were again at Chestnut Hall, during the absence of Colonel and Mrs. Stone in Switzerland.

The returned exile had not accorded to Rosa Bland—the original cause of his banishment—anything beyond a *very* friendly greeting. His manner revealed the character of a sincere friend rather

than that of a devoted lover. He did and said many things with a view of convincing the young lady that the first-named position was that he wished to occupy in her estimation; but he did not avail himself of any opportunity of evincing a desire to fill the second and closer relationship. Being at present in ignorance of his uncle's marriage, he still supposed Rosa Bland to be the "poor girl" he left her on his departure from England.

"Don't run so fast, or you'll fall again, my darling," said Rosa to the baby, Flora Stone, who was now just twelve months old.

"Well, little trotter!" said Ernest, as he entered the room. "Are you still shy of your uncle, or will you come and give him a kiss?"

"Mam, mam, mam, mam," said the

child, as, like a scared kitten, she ran from her unknown uncle to her well-known friend.

“Mam, mam, mam, mam,” repeated the uncle, with a smile. “*Mam* is, at least, *half* way to mam-ma, is it not, Rosa? But *your* affection for the child might well encourage her in an endeavour to perfect the word.”

“Is there anything very remarkable in such an attachment?” inquired Rosa in rather a satirical vein. “It is said that everyone, however humble, must have an object of some kind or other whereon to fix the affections, and as the feelings of human beings on approaching maturity seem susceptible of change, would it be possible to find a better subject for one’s love than an engaging and devoted child?”

“Devoted for the *time being*,” replied

Ruby. "Yet, like any other tender shoot, a loving child is but a growing plant, and its natural tendencies may, of course, be changed under the maturing process of time."

"Oh!" exclaimed Rosa, in an assumed tone of surprise. "You mean to say, I suppose, that when the affections have been transplanted, the heart, like that of any other wanderer from home, may, through an extended knowledge of the world, discover its own and proper habitation?"

"Precisely so," was the honest reply. "Yet in the early stages of human nature, young, inexperienced, or impulsive lovers may incur certain moral obligations that cannot be cancelled by a transfer of the affections. During those two years of exile—now happily brought to a close—



the wanderer's pay has been somewhat in excess of his requirements. It is therefore, Rosa, with infinite pleasure that I now beg your acceptance of the unappropriated balance."

Hereupon Ernest placed on the table before which Rosa and the child were seated a bank draft for £500.

"Beg my acceptance of five hundred pounds!" said the astonished Rosa. "But what—what's the object?"

"The *object*, did you say?" inquired the intended donor, who appeared at a loss for an answer.

"Yes, what's the object of the proposed gift?" repeated Rosa. "I can understand a volunteer wishing to purchase his discharge from any service into which he may hastily or foolishly have entered. But where no enlistment has actually taken

...ce, no purchase-money for a discharge  
...n be required."

"But *you* are not the *only* person to be considered in this matter," said Ernest, with considerable feeling. "What was the solemn request of a loving parent on her death-bed? '*When I am gone, remember the widow Bland!*' Such were my mother's last words to her son Ernest. And the widow Bland is *worthy* of remembrance, is she not?"

By this unexpected and sensitive touch on her feelings, Rosa was for a moment disconcerted; and it was with difficulty that she remained silent concerning the change that had taken place in the position of the late widow Bland. But after a pause, she partially regained her self-possession.

"At present, Ernest, I will merely ob-

serve that *your* good opinion of my mother has long been shared by *other* members of your family."

"I am glad to hear *that*, although a *dependent* position is naturally a precarious one."

"But my mother, I am happy to say, is now in a position to take care of herself," replied the daughter, with a smile.

"Don't be too sure of that, Rosa," continued Ernest. "Although the colonel has a generous heart, he has, at the same time, a fiery spirit. In a hasty or unguarded moment, he may some day send his housekeeper to the *right about*, without notice and without pay."

"Oh dear, no," continued Rosa, smiling. "On your arrival at your uncle's, you will soon find that mother is by far too attentive to his wants, and those attentions

are too highly appreciated, for the colonel to dismiss his attendant in the summary fashion you describe."

"Then you should consider *your own position*, Rosa," said the intended benefactor. "Although *now* well educated, you are still *poor*, and should your mother decline to accept the wanderer's savings, they may be found useful to *you* at some future time."

"Ernest," said Rosa with emotion, "I most sincerely thank you for your past and present kindness both to my mother and myself. With regard to *my own position*, I feel bound to communicate it to you at once. You must know, then, that since your departure from England my late grandfather, before his death, sent for and embraced the widow Bland, whom he had never before seen or acknowledged

as his daughter-in-law. He would have left her the whole of his property, but she declined to accept it at such a moment, and under so sudden a change in the feelings of a dying relative. He, however, adopted her advice, by leaving one-half of his fortune to charitable institutions. The manner in which he disposed of the other half may be gathered from one of the legatees. Here is a letter I this morning received from my late grandfather's solicitor."

Rosa Bland here handed to her intended benefactor the following letter :—

"Leeds,

"October 12th.

"DEAR MADAM,

"I am happy to inform you that judgment has just been given in favour

of the last will and testament of the late Mark Bland, with costs against the appellants.

"You will therefore, under your grandfather's will, be entitled to the sum of thirty thousand pounds (£30,000), with interest.

"The above-named amount, in Bank Stock, will, in due course, be transferred to *your* name by the executors of my late client.

"I am, dear madam,

"Yours truly,

"CALEB CANDOUR.

"Miss Rosa Bland."

"Good heavens!"

Such was the joyful exclamation of Ernest, after the perusal of the lawyer's letter.

"Thirty thousand pounds! A nice little fortune! Is it possible, Rosa? Why, they've made a lady of you at once!"

"Have they really, Ernest?" said Rosa, with a hearty laugh. "And if this is the sum required to transform a poor girl into a lady *at once*——"

"I mean, of course, in a monetary sense," interrupted Ernest.

"That's what *I* mean," continued Rosa, smiling. "Because, if a smaller sum would effect a similar transformation, and if your uncle should deprive you of your conditional inheritance, through your attachment to some *poor girl*, your past kindness to the widow Bland and her daughter would fully entitle you to one-half of my present fortune."

"Rosa!" said Ernest, with much warmth

of feeling, "you have, indeed, a noble and generous heart, and the brotherly affection with which you have now inspired me——"

The speaker was suddenly interrupted by the entrance of his brother. Rosa at once left the room with little Flora.

"You see, Ernest," said his brother Ruby, "even in the midst of my social misfortune, I may consider myself fortunate in having friends who take an interest in the *infant* survivor, although the *adult* must now, I suppose, go uncared for."

"Rosa appears to have taken a *particular* fancy to little Flora," replied Ernest.

"Yes," continued the brother. "But is it not strange that, with all her engaging features both of mind and body,



nobody in the form of a suitor should have taken a fancy to Rosa?"

"Indeed!" said Ernest, in an assumed tone of surprise. "But except to a member of her own sex, she would not, I imagine, be very communicative on such a subject. Maria would, no doubt, be taken into her confidence in a case of the kind."

"That's just what *I* imagined," said the widower. "Yet last week, Maria seemed doubtful as to whether Rosa *was* or was *not* engaged, but this week she appears to think she is *disengaged*."

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed Ernest, with a smile. "By your repeated inquiries, I may infer that you are somewhat interested in the question, eh, Ruby?"

"I *am* interested," was the emphatic reply. "I should like to see Rosa united

to one who could fully appreciate her many good qualities. But in the absence of money on her part, the great magnet of attraction is, of course, wanting."

"Yet possessed, as she shortly will be, of thirty thousand pounds, the magnet may soon prove effective," said Ernest.

"What do you mean?" inquired the brother.

"I mean thirty thousand pounds—*that's all*," was the reply.

"This is the first time I ever heard of such a thing," said Ruby,

"She has only just heard of it herself," continued Ernest. "But you are aware, I suppose, of the visit to her grandfather just before his death?"

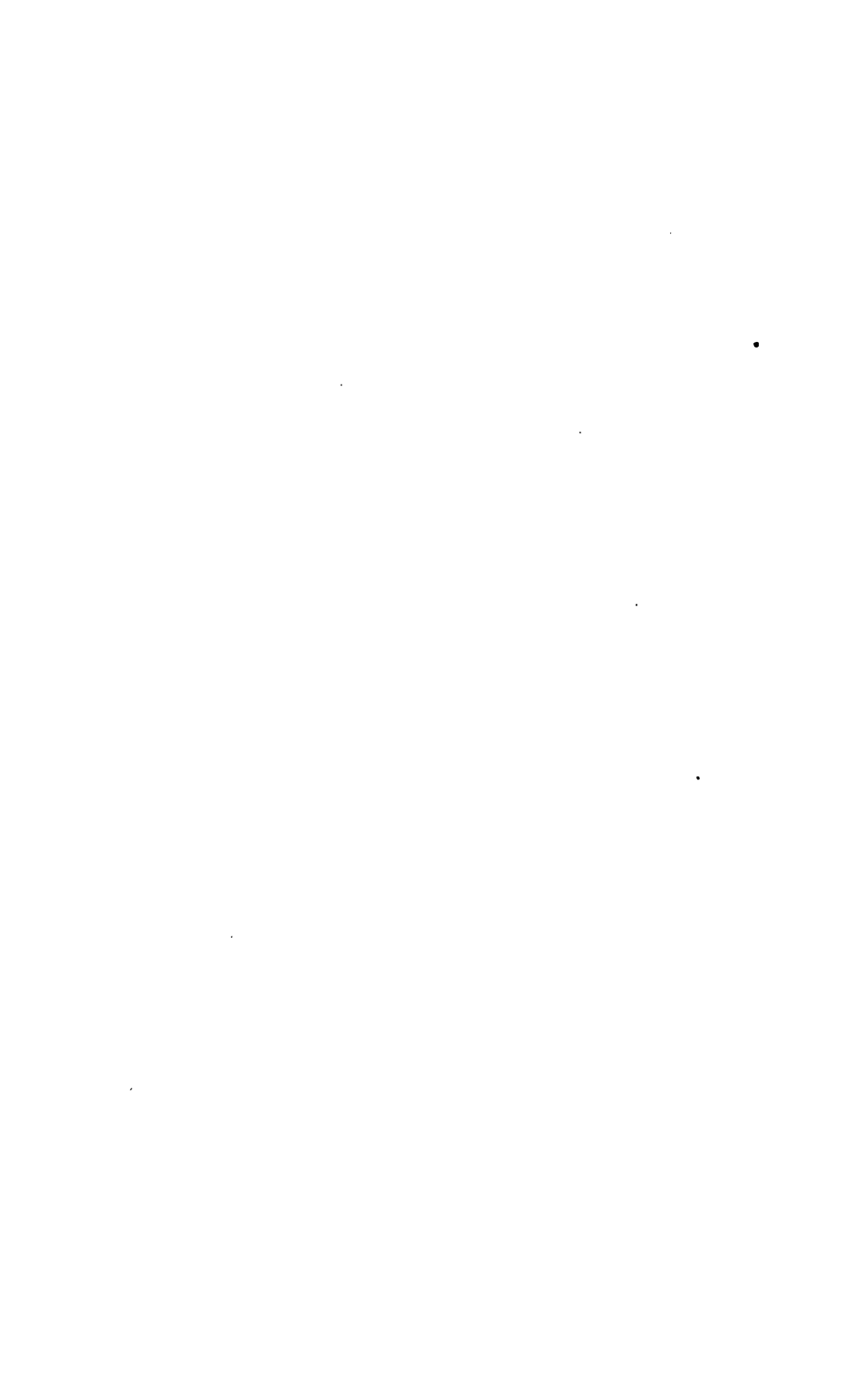
"I *am*," replied the widower. "And I

am also aware that under his will she was named as one of the legatees. But I was subsequently informed the will was likely to be a nullity."

"Instead of which," said Ernest, "it has been pronounced a *sterling reality*—a reality from which Rosa Bland will derive the nice little sum I have just named."

"Then with such a tempting bait," said the widower, "she will soon attract a shoal of fishes eager for a bite. By-the-bye, Ernest, it appeared to be on a matter relating to the affections that your friend Mr. Belman's curiosity was lately aroused. He seemed very anxious to learn whether you were *really* attached to some poor and unlettered girl. But I told him that, in *my* opinion, the affair was only a myth."

“Quite right, Ruby,” replied the brother.  
“And as I am about to pay the gentleman  
a visit, he may possibly make some allusion  
to the subject.”





## CHAPTER XIV.

*A MYSTERY EXPLAINED.*



**I**T was a beautiful day in the month of October, when Ernest Stone, the returned wanderer, reached one of the most romantic parts of Derbyshire. On arriving opposite the charming villa in which—as he had reason to suppose—Mr. and Mrs. Belman and their precious Pearl resided, he was startled by a large black board, bearing in white letters the following notice :—

“ This commodious freehold Residence,



with good stabling and five acres of land, to be let or sold.

"For particulars apply to Messrs. Upward and Down, auctioneers and estate agents, Buxton."

"To be let?" said Ernest to himself. "But the house still appears to be furnished. Are the former tenants gone? If not, what—what's the object?"

As he stood putting these and other (unanswered) queries to himself, Mr. Belman from inside the dwelling, suddenly caught sight of the long-expected stranger. Rushing to the front door, and from the door to the lawn-gate without his hat, the delighted gentleman with both hands grasped those of the returned exile, whom he shook in a manner to make him at least *feel* that he was heartily welcomed to England.

“My dear young friend, we thought you were either lost or that you had forsaken us altogether. Come along!” said Mr. Belman, as he hurried the visitor into the hall, and from thence into the best bedroom, in order that he might refresh himself with a little soap and water after his journey. Another kind of refreshment was soon furnished and enjoyed.

“Well, Mrs. Belman,” said the visitor, at the close of a substantial repast, “by the announcement on a board in front of your charming residence I was for the moment apprehensive that the tenants had already taken their departure. But the sudden appearance of your husband quickly dispelled the disagreeable illusion.”

“Although, Ernest, as you plainly see, we have not yet left our present abode, we

“Here it is, my friend,” continued the host, as he prefaced the recital by again filling his wine-glass: “The theatre, or rather the stage of a theatre is not a place where noblemen, as a rule, would seek a chaste or virtuous woman for a wife. Yet the stage may be trod by women with morals as pure as any that ever adorned the most exalted beings in creation. Of this class a star of the first magnitude once dazzled the eyes, excited the feelings, and charmed the hearts of those who nightly crowded a well-known London theatre. Miss Rarity was the name of the enchantress. One among her most ardent admirers was the Marquis of Landport. He would have married her openly and honourably in sight of all the world; but, alas! his father, the Duke of Headland, who held a high position in the State, would for

ever have turned his back upon his eldest son for such an alliance. Yet love for the lady was too strong for duty to the parent, and the lover honourably enacted in *private* the part he was prohibited from performing in public. The issue of that happy union was a lovely little girl who became motherless when six months old—the young marchioness having died in the twenty fifth year of her age, and two years after her retirement from the public stage. The rest may soon be told. Under the *incognito* of Pearl the infant offspring was placed under our charge. Here she remained till the time she could be fearlessly proclaimed as the legitimate daughter of her noble parent. That day arrived during your absence from England. The Duke of Headland died, his son, the Marquis of

Landport, succeeded to the dukedom, and he at once took to his arms and to his home his beloved daughter, Lady Lovegrove."

"Most marvellous! most wonderful! and most astounding episode!" loudly yet *sadly* exclaimed the excited hearer, followed by an ominous shake of the head. "The daughter of a duke!—and the Duke of Headland, too! So much then for the end of *my* social hopes and expectations!"

"Nay, Ernest, don't say so," replied the host, as he again patronized the old *port*. "Rather consider the end of the mystery the *beginning* of your hopes."

"But the Duke of Headland is never likely to accept or acknowledge Ernest Stone as his son-in-law. I know sufficient of the world to feel tolerably certain on *that*

head," said the visitor. "Apart from that, Mr. Belman, would the daughter of a duke herself, from her exalted position, be likely to accept the hand of a commoner?"

"That, of course, is a point which will have to be decided before the parent one," said the host. "Perhaps, Ernest, you would like your doubt on that *head*, as you facetiously term it, dispelled at once?"

"I should indeed," was the reply.

"Then let me see whether I have been invested with power for the accomplishment of such a feat," said the host, who, with a smile of satisfaction playing on his lips, took from his pocket-book a card carefully wrapped and re-wrapped in paper. This card Mr. Belman handed to the visitor. The following name was *printed*,

while the motto beneath was in the handwriting of a lady :—

Lady Leonora Lovegrove.

(*"Faithful, though absent."*)

"Lady Leonora Lovegrove!" exclaimed the visitor. "Whose handwriting is this below the name on the card, Mr. Belman?"

"The handwriting of the lady named above," was the reply.

"But the motto is *mine*," said Ernest, with increasing excitement and curiosity.

"Yes," continued the host, "and by the adoption of that motto by your first valentine, can you have a stronger proof that our redeemed or precious Pearl—even though a coronet might be within her reach—would have no objection for her

hand to follow in the direction of her heart ?”

“ If I had an assurance of the fact——”

“ Can you have a better assurance than that of the card that was given to Mrs. Belman for presentation to you on your return to England ?” inquired the host.

“ It seems not, indeed. Yet was ever such an alliance heard of since the world began ?” inquired the astonished lover.

“ Yes,” replied Mr. Belman. “ And what has once occurred may occur again. Did not the Duke himself marry an actress ? And may not the daughter be pardoned for an act of love for which the parent considered himself *unjustly* punished ?”

“ Men often attempt to justify, on their *own part*, actions which they would be the



first to condemn on the part of *others*," said Ernest.

"That's very true, especially where there is any great disparity in the social or titular distinction of the parties," replied the host. "But you must remember, Ernest, that peers or princes are not always blind to the monetary position of a young man; and, in *this* respect, you might buy up half a dozen giddy lordlings, with little in their heads and less in their pockets."

"Yet when the Duke becomes acquainted with the *untitled* character of——"

"He is already acquainted with *everything*," interrupted Mr. Belman. "On the appearance of a lordly suitor for the hand of his daughter, the fearless and outspoken maid told her noble father that

as she had no heart at her disposal, she dare not deceive a suitor by the offer of a heartless hand. The Duke then sought information concerning the absent and unknown owner of the priceless jewel, and that knowledge, which he failed to obtain from his daughter, was furnished by her late guardian. Thereupon he expressed a wish to see the wanderer on his return to England."

"To administer to him a severe oral castigation, no doubt?" said Ernest.

"Perhaps *so*, and perhaps *not*," replied the host. "But the daughter expressed a wish that you should see the Duke."

"Then I'll see the Duke, or a *dozen* dukes if it be necessary. Pardon my anxiety, Mr. Belman, and in turning to another subject, let me ask your motive for

leaving your present abode?" said the visitor.

"A charming spot—as my wife told you—is not always self-supporting ; and, when an officer is placed on *half-pay*——"


"Enough !" said Ernest. "Pray oblige me by having that black board removed.



## CHAPTER XV.

*A DUCAL EXAMINATION.*



HE Duke of Headland held an important position in the English Government. The political party to whom he belonged happened to be in office. Anyone—even a duke—to fill an exalted post in the Government of his country, must necessarily be a man of more than ordinary capacity. Such a man was the Duke of Headland. Although not filling the first place, as Premier in the Ministerial circle, he was one of the Cabinet Ministers for guiding the State

ship of the greatest nation in the world. As Marquis of Landport, he had had considerable experience both on the Ministerial and Opposition benches in the House of Commons; and at one time it was generally supposed that his lordship was destined to succeed his father in command of the national barque. That the lofty and well-defined views of the young statesman—backed by the *moral* character of the man—eminently fitted him for the highest seat in the Government, few persons were disposed to doubt. But in the political arena—as in any other sphere of life—accidental circumstances will sometimes not only place men in advance of their betters, but also invest them with power they are only qualified to wield through an insidious display of those arts by which they first ob-

tained an unmerited step on the way to fame.

Opposite feelings of hope and fear agitated the mind of Ernest Stone on the eventful morning named for his visit to the Duke of Headland. The hope of success and the fear of failure were cross currents that created a kind of nervous excitement in an otherwise firm and fearless system. Against the single advantage of a large monetary fortune, Ernest felt that he had many *disadvantages* to contend with. Although he had received a good commercial education, he had not, like his brother Ruby, been to college and obtained a high degree for classical attainments. These deficiencies he considered, might tell seriously against a suitor for the hand of a duke's daughter—more especially the daughter of that dis-



tinguished statesman the Duke of Headland.

The Duke had already informed Mr. Belman that no oral or epistolary correspondence could be allowed between his late ward and Ernest Stone till he had himself seen and conversed with the young man, who appeared to have won the good opinion of his daughter. A day was appointed for the interview, and the hour of that day was close at hand.

When, in company with Mr. Belman, Ernest approached the London residence of the Duke of Headland, he looked like some distracted sufferer on the way to a dentist, before the discovery of "painless dentistry."

On entering the Duke's mansion, Mr. Belman and Ernest were at once conducted to the library. It wanted only a

few minutes of the time named for the coming meeting ; and at the expiration of those few minutes the Duke, attired in a morning gown, with a roll of papers in his hand, entered the room. Mr. Belman at once introduced the stranger. A cordial shake of the hand by the nobleman appeared to inspire the visitor with a little of that confidence which at this moment he stood so much in need of.

“Be seated — pray be seated, Mr. Stone,” said the Duke, as he scanned the stranger from head to foot.

The request was obeyed, and the dreaded examiner seated himself directly facing his would-be son-in-law, while Mr. Belman quietly retired to another room.

“I am informed, Mr. Stone, that your travelling movements during the last two years have been on rather an extensive

scale?" said the Duke, as the fixed and critical gaze of his eye failed to turn that of Ernest from the object he was about to address.

"Yes, my lord, I have covered a considerable space of the globe, both by sea and land."

So saying, the visitor felt somewhat surprised that the immediate subject of his visit had not been at once introduced.

"Nothing like a personal and practical knowledge of the world for a basis on which the judgment of a young man may be matured. In your home travels, Mr. Stone, was there in the United Kingdom any *one* thing above another to occasion wonder or admiration?" inquired the Duke.

"Apart from the natural and scenic beauties of the kingdom, and the vast

extent of our docks and shipping, I derived the greatest pleasure from an insight into the mechanical wonders in the various manufacturing districts," replied the visitor.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Duke, with a smile of seeming satisfaction; "you were then at the fountain head or chief source of national greatness. The fact of your feeling interested in such a subject, Mr. Stone, is *prima facie* evidence of a taste for knowledge not sufficiently cultivated by the majority of young men of the present day."

A pause on the part of the speaker, followed by a reference to one of the documents in his hand, induced a belief that he was now about to refer to *another* subject for which the visitor *had* a "taste." But to the intense astonishment of the late wan-

derer, his wandering notes and jottings appeared the only matters concerning which the Duke of Headland desired information.

“I have also been informed that you have paid lengthened visits to some of our leading and most distant colonial possessions?” said the statesman. “You no doubt discovered that in her colonies England can boast of children not only of rapid growth, but likewise of considerable promise?”

“Yes, my lord,” replied the late wanderer, with a smile — “children of so *much* promise that in one or two cases there appeared a growing disposition to dispense with parental guidance and protection.”

“A natural feature both with fast young states and fast young people, although the

premature appearance of such a feature is an unfortunate thing for all concerned," said the Duke. "But there may always be found in a precocious world those who consider *their own* wisdom superior to that of their elders. I may fairly assume that colonial politics were not very attractive to *you*, Mr. Stone?"

"Not particularly attractive, my lord. Yet it was impossible not to notice a source of daily contention or conflict, especially when certain very little men are regarded as very great *statesmen*."

"Regarded by whom?" said the Duke.

"By *themselves*, my lord," was the reply.

"Very good!" exclaimed the Duke, with a loud laugh.

"Sir Lionel Lustre waits your grace in the drawing-room," said a man-servant who

here entered with a telegraphic message for the Duke.

“Good morning, Mr. Stone,” said the statesman, on shaking his young visitor by the hand. “I am pleased at having made your acquaintance.”

Hereupon the Duke of Headland retired, and Ernest Stone was conducted to the room in which Mr. Belman waited his appearance. In a few moments both were on their way from a mansion that had been entered with a view of obtaining light relating to a subject on which the visitors were still left entirely in the dark.

“Well, Ernest,” said Mr. Belman, “have you had a pleasant conversation with the Duke?”

“Very pleasant indeed, *so far as it went*, and it went all the way to the antipodes.”

"To the *antipodes*?" said the senior.

"Yes," replied Ernest, "and that's just the distance his lordship has left me concerning the chief object of my visit to him."

"But he made some reference to the subject, I suppose?" inquired Mr. Belman.

"He didn't even mention his daughter's name," said the suitor.

"That's strange," said Mr. Belman. "Yet on consideration, there would appear to be nothing strange in the affair. The statesman is *still* a statesman, whether at home or abroad. He therefore carries his official reserve even into private life. That, my friend, may account for what would otherwise appear *unaccountable*."

"But the Duke talked of matters so entirely foreign to the subject in which I supposed we were *both* interested, that I



almost, at last, felt inclined to say, 'What's the object?'

"The object of a senator's diversion is well-known," said Mr. Belman. "That object is to avoid an immediate pledge on *any* subject, however interesting that subject may be to his friends. He *thinks* a good deal, while saying *very little* on the matter for consideration. Thus it is, that he will often talk of anything else but the matter in hand, while he endeavours to obtain from others something to guide him to a decision on the point in reserve."

"But for my *own part*," said the disappointed lover, "I am neither a jot wiser nor an inch nearer the end in view. In fact, my position is precisely the same as when I was an entire stranger to the Duke."

"Not so, my friend," replied Mr. Bel-

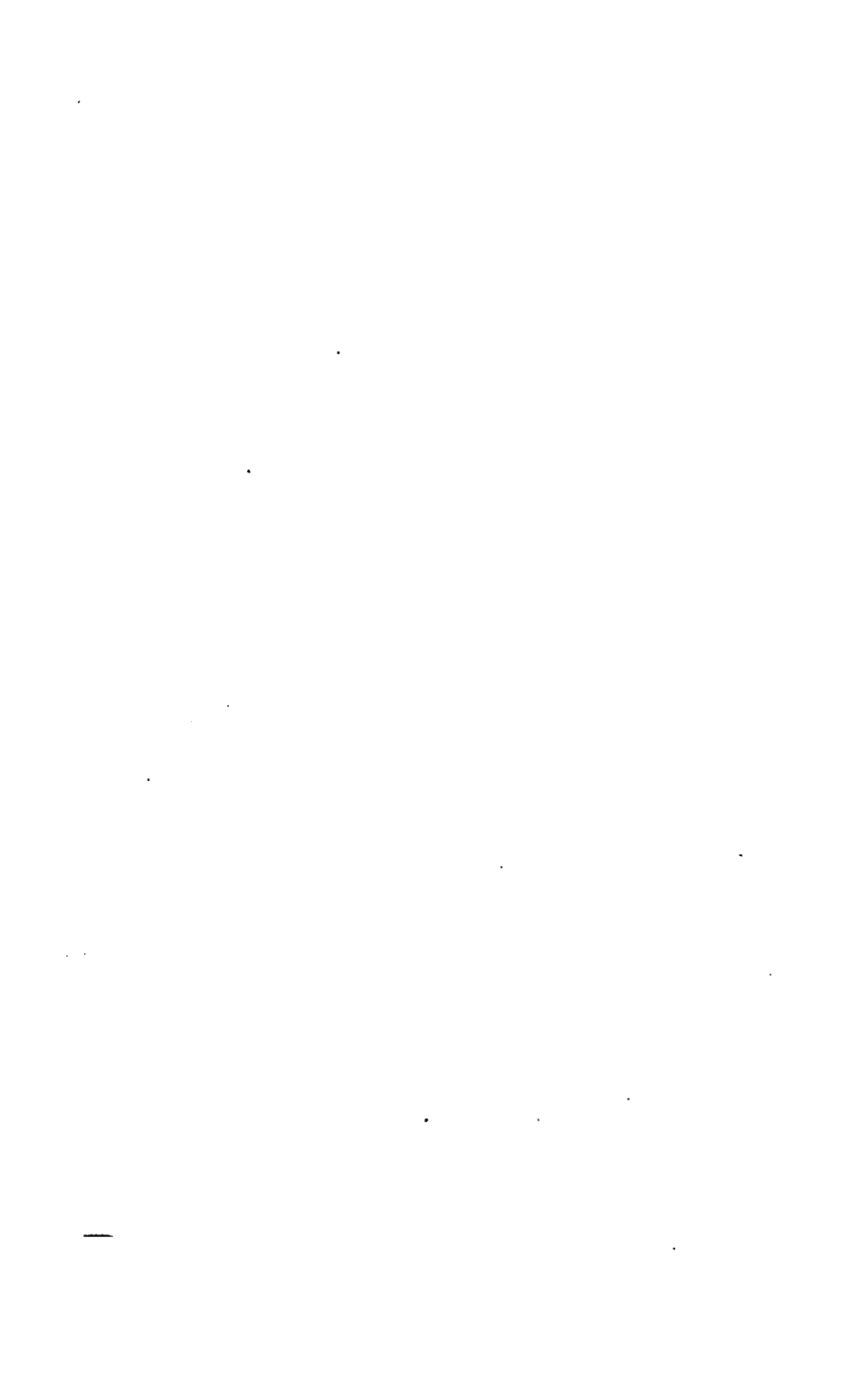
man, with a smile. "By your examination, the examiner has no doubt obtained something that will enable him either to favour or frustrate your suit. To use a commercial expression, I may venture to say that the Duke has quietly '*taken stock*' of you ; and in due time the result of that '*stock-taking*' will be made known. You will then learn whether the balance is *for* or *against* the suitor for the hand of Lady Leonora Lovegrove."





CHAPTER XVI.

*THE DENOUEMENT.*



“**D**ON'T call it *pleasure*, Maria,” said Rosa Bland. “If nobody liked London more than *I* like it, the crowd would not be everywhere so great, while the comfort would be far greater. One can't go to any place of entertainment without being deprived of more than half the pleasure by a senseless crush. Since our return to town, these things have appeared to me to be doubly disagreeable.”

“Compared, of course, with the more

agreeable things in the country?" significantly observed Maria. "The secluded pleasures and pastimes to be found in some rural retreat may afford enjoyment that cannot be obtained at the opera, the ball, or a densely crowded '*at home.*' But I remember the time, Rosa, when you preferred the sensational scenes of London even to those enjoyable walks you have recently discovered in the beautiful county of Devon."

"I was not then familiar with the varied and attractive features of nature," replied Rosa.

"Especially the attractive features surrounding Chestnut Hall, eh, Rosa?"

"Chestnut Hall is a charming spot, and little Flora is an attractive object in keeping with the place," was the reply.

"And Ruby seems reluctant to return

without a promise that we will visit him again before Christmas," added Maria. "But uncle having only just returned from Switzerland, and Ernest not yet a month at home, such a promise on our part is of course impossible."

"By your cogent reasoning you would make it appear so," replied Rosa, in a humorous vein. "But is there not *another* reason for Maria wishing to remain in town? When Mr. Frank Fairly called here this morning on business, it was surely very considerate on the part of the colonel to invite the young gentleman to dinner on *your* birthday. Now, I must say that I consider Mr. Fairly a very superior and promising young man."

"Admitted," said Maria, with a smile.

"So that the situation you obtained for



him in the bank two years ago has been turned to good account, eh, Maria?"

"I admit this, and *more* than this," was the reply, "yet I intend to keep nice young men at a respectful distance till Ruby and Ernest are comfortably settled. When every member of the family, *except one*, is married, that single one may *then* be induced to take her solitary position into consideration — but *not till then*, Rosa."

"Well, Maria," said her brother Ruby, as he entered the room, "if you are not disposed to re-consider your decision against my proposition, I will make a final appeal to Rosa."

"Then I'll leave Rosa to settle the question with you," said Maria, on retiring from the apartment.

"And Rosa will hardly be so unkind as

to doom an unwilling hermit to pass the festive season of Christmas in solitude?" said the widower, as he put on the overcoat, lined with fur, for his intended journey. "In *your* absence, Rosa, Chestnut Hall will indeed appear dull."

"Not while science affords you so much pleasure in studying *distant* objects," replied Rosa, with a smile.

"But there are *home* subjects which can neither be forgotten nor neglected," returned the widower. "Yet should circumstances prevent Rosa from becoming the central object of attraction on the coming joyful occasion, I must adopt the sage advice of my north country friends, and '*bide my time.*' Meanwhile, let me bid my only hope of earthly happiness farewell!"

At the moment Ruby saluted his loved

one with a parting kiss, his brother Ernest entered the room.

"Pardon this unintended intrusion," said Ernest, with a smile; "but a Stone—unlike a potato—is not supposed to have *eyes*. The colonel's brougham is at the door, Ruby, and you have only just time to catch the express."

"Then I'm off!" said the widower.

"I'll accompany you to the station," added Ernest, as he preceded his brother on his way to the street door.

"Ruby!" said Rosa, as her suitor descended the stairs from the drawing-room, "you will, of course, present little Flora with the stolen kiss?"

"What!" exclaimed the retiring widower with a laugh; "invest the child with stolen goods? No; you should have presented me with a gift for the occasion."

Rosa re-entered the drawing-room, and from the window waved her handkerchief, in response to the raised hat of her lover at the moment of his departure for Chestnut Hall.

"In the name of fortune, or *misfortune*, what have you been doing to Ernest the last day or two?" said Colonel Stone, on entering the room in company with his wife.

"What have *I* been doing to him?" said Rosa, in surprise.

"Yes," continued the colonel, in his usual quaint manner. "Either you, or Maria, or Ruby, or somebody else, or all of you together, must have been firing blank cartridges at him. His head would appear to be suddenly bewildered. But whether the excitement arises from pleasure or pain, or proceeds from joy or

sorrow, I am utterly at a loss to divine. Yesterday—without either a great-coat or umbrella—he walked round and round the square in the pouring rain, till he was completely wet through. This morning—buttoned up in his overcoat, and under cover of an open umbrella—he took a similar walk, although there was neither a spot of rain nor a glimmer of sunshine.”

“Where is Ernest *now*, Rosa?” inquired Mrs. Stone.

“He is just gone to the railway station to see Ruby off by the train.”

“And may possibly start off *himself*, before he has discovered his mistake,” added the uncle.

On the return of the empty brougham, the owner’s suspicion seemed for the moment to be confirmed. But this was soon

dispelled by the appearance of his nephew on the box-seat of a cab, smoking a cigar—smoking being a habit in which he was never before known to indulge.

Rosa Bland immediately retired from the room when her first—*supposed*—lover entered.

“Well, Ernest,” said the uncle, “you have lately been taking us all by surprise.”

“The world is full of surprises,” replied the nephew, with a spirit of unusual buoyancy. “On my return from a series of antipodal surprises, others of a still more surprising nature confronted me on *this* side the globe. At Chestnut Hall I was surprised to find that the beautifully polished Wood, in the form of a brother’s wife, had been taken from a Stone building, to the severe loss of the survivor.”

"Very true, Ernest," said the colonel. "But you might have added that the path of the survivor is still cheered by a living and beautiful little memento of past bliss."

"Well, uncle, or, rather, *uncle* and *aunt*," continued the nephew, with increasing humour, "on my reaching *head-quarters* here, what did I discover? Why, to my great surprise, I discovered that during my absence from England, an old soldier had brought a successful engagement to a glorious close. And what has already been the result of the conquest? A son and heir that would have been the *very image* of the victor, if he had only been born with *one arm*."\*

These remarks were followed by loud laughter on the part of Colonel Stone and

\* The parent had lost an arm on the field of battle.

his wife, while the features of the playful reviewer bore no external trace of the natural humour that prompted his observations.

“Your journey round the world, Ernest, has given a keen edge to the tone of your observation,” said the colonel. “But having favoured us with a comical picture of events that have caused surprise on *your* part, have you no remarkable event in your *own* life that might occasion a little surprise on *our* part?”

“You shall judge for yourself,” replied the nephew, in a jocular tone, followed by remarks freshened by an occasional dash of satire. “Previous to the period of my exile, a just, though rigorous, guardian was anxious to know the name of that *poor girl* for whom I was banished. The name is now a familiar one.”



"Familiar to whom?" inquired the uncle.

"To the inquisitor," was the reply. 'By *this* time Colonel Stone has surely become familiar with the name of Rosa Bland?"

In answer to a silent look of surprise and inquiry from her husband, Mrs. Stone, with a blushing smile, replied,

"Quite correct, dear."

"Well, uncle," continued the nephew, "in my *brotherly* attachment for one who has since become so near and dear to you, I have fortunately been the means of preventing any distant suitor from securing a prize which I have every reason to believe is not likely to be taken from the family circle.\* I now come to *another* mystery.

\* Twelve months after the death of his first wife, Ruby Stone marries Rosa Bland.

Let me therefore venture to express a hope that my guardian and dictator—who has taken a personal interest in the *deserving poor*—may not be inclined to turn his back on the equally deserving rich?"

"Are you *now* merely joking, Ernest, or, in alluding to some *other* case, are you really serious?" inquired the uncle.

"Serious as the Pope," was the reply. "But, in proof of this, allow me to present you with the lady's card. Though *absent*, she will speak for herself."

The late wanderer here handed his guardian the card by which the constancy of the fair one whose name it bore was assured.

"'Lady Lenora Lovegrove. *Faithful, though absent,*'" said the astonished colonel,

on passing the card to his wife. "I am still in the dark, Ernest."

"I'll endeavour to enlighten you," replied the nephew, with a satirical smile of satisfaction, provoked by the commanding position he had at length secured. "This letter, from a well-known and distinguished nobleman, will at once uncurtain the mystery, and crown the lover's compact."

The speaker now handed his guardian an important-looking epistle, bearing on the seal an impress of a duke's coronet.

"Norman House,

"November 20th.

"MY DEAR MR. STONE,

"Finding that my daughter has formed an attachment, based on a regard which I have reason to believe is reciprocated by her suitor, I have given the

subject my most attentive and serious consideration.

“Intelligence in the mind of a young man of independent means and unblemished character, will ever stand higher in *my* estimation than the most exalted rank, with a stain on the escutcheon of the bearer.

“After the pleasure I derived from a recent interview with you, I will merely observe that, should there be a mutual desire for a future alliance between you and my beloved daughter, no objection to the union will be raised by the young lady’s father and your newly-constituted friend,

“HEADLAND.

“Ernest Stone, Esq.”

“The Duke of Headland!” exclaimed

the colonel, in a joyful tone of amazement, as he passed the letter to his wife. "But I was not, till now, aware the Duke *had* a daughter. Did *you* ever hear of such a person, Mrs. Stone?"

"No, dear," replied the wife, with a smile. "But my *very recent* introduction to fashionable life should fully account for my want of knowledge on such a subject."

"In due time all will be fully explained," continued the accepted suitor. "Meanwhile, you must know that the mysterious Pearl has just been redeemed from the hands of her late guardians, and raised by her noble father to that exalted station to which she was justly entitled at her birth."

"Then Lady Leonora Lovegrove was one of the playmates of your childhood?"

and this is the beautiful and mysterious Pearl, eh ?” said the astonished colonel. “Ernest, my boy, if we continue in this way to increase our circle by large jewels, and the subsequent addition of little ones, some future member of the family may set up as a dealer in precious Stones. But let me for a moment be seriously sentimental. The glorious sun that shines alike on rich and poor, reflects a picture for the great moral of life. Seated at my side is the human instrument by which I was rescued from the jaws of death. Thus in all things may be traced the guiding hand of Providence. Let us then feel assured that, while vice cannot for ever go unpunished, virtue will, sooner or later, obtain her just reward.”

One word from the writer to the reader. The author’s labour is ended. The highest

return that could be obtained for the same may be reflected by the hope that no attentive reader at the close of the work will have occasion to say—“*What's the object?*”

THE END.

